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ROBINSON JEFFERS

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Cawdor

and other poems

Cawdor
and other poems

by

Robinson Jeffers

Horace Liveright
New York 1928

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Cawdor

I

In nineteen-nine a fire swept our coast hills,
But not the canyons oceanward; Cawdor's ranges
And farm were safe. He had posted sentinels,
His son George and his man Jesus Acanna,
On two hills, and they watched the fire all night
Stream toward Cachagua; the big-coned inland pines
Made pillars of white flame.

Cawdor at dawn
Stood by his door and saw in the bronze light
That leaked through towers of smoke windowed with
sanguine
Reflections of the burning, two does and a fawn
Spring down the creek-bed stones of his ravine
Fleeing from their terror, and then a tawny mountain-lion
With no eyes for the deer. Next walked a lame
Gray horse, a girl led it, a broken old man,
His face bound with a dirty cloth, clung weakly
To the limping withers. Cawdor recognized him
Though he was faceless, old Martial, who had got a place
In the hills two years before, a feeble old man
Marked for misfortune; his stock, the first year, sickened
With lump-jaw; when a cow died in the creek

Martial had let her lie there. Then Cawdor had ridden
And cursed him, and Cawdor with his man Acanna
Roped the horns to draw the carcass out of the stream,
But when they drew, it burst.
Now Martial came, he and his daughter Fera,
For refuge, having saved from the fire nothing
But their own lives and the lame horse.

The old man
Reeled and was dumb with pain, but the girl asked
For Hood Cawdor, and Cawdor said "Not here.
He left last winter." Hood was his second son,
The hunter, with whom he had quarrelled. And Fera Martial:
"We've come," she pointed toward the smoke-towers, "from that.
You are Hood's father. You've the same drooping eyes, like a big animal's
That never needs to look sideways. I'm sorry, you'll have to take us in. My father is burnt, he is blinded.
The fire was on us before we awoke. He tried to fetch a bridle out of the burning stable.
There was a drum of coal-oil against the wall exploded and blew fire over his face.
I dragged him out of the fire." He said "Bring him in."
"It wasn't dark," she answered, "the oaks were like torches,
And all the hill roared like a wave. He says we can go in, father, here is the door-step."
The old man groaned, lifting his hand to his face but not touching it, and hung back from the door.
"I wish to God you had left me at home." She said, "Your home?" "To be a blackened log with the others

Lying quiet," he said, "in the burnt hollow under the hill,
and not have any care and not come
Blind and crying to my enemy's place." He turned in her
hands and said "Oh Fera, where is the sun?
Is it afternoon?" She stood and held him. "Dear, only
dawn. I think it must have come up, it's hidden
In the hell of smoke." "Turn me that way before I go in,
To the good light that gave me so many days. I have
failed, and failed, and failed. Now I'll go in
As men go into the grave, and not fail any more."

He was in fact passive from that time on,
Except the restlessness of pain in bed
While his face scarred and the eyes died in the dark.
After the pain was lulled he seemed content
With blindness, it made an end of labor.

Cawdor meanwhile
Would somehow have sent him up coast to Monterey
To find other charity; but the girl Fera
Coming ragged and courageous out of the fire
With cool gray eyes, had troubled his tough heart.
He'd not seen her before that dawn; and the image
Of the young haggard girl streaked with the dirt of the fire
And her skirt torn to bandage her father's face
Lived like a plant in his blood. He was fifty years old,
And mocked at himself; she was nineteen, she said.
But being a beggar really, under the burden
Of that blind man to care for, discounted youth;
And Cawdor, whatever the next ten years might bring
him,
Felt no weight in the fifty. He had been stronger
From his youth up than other men, and still

The strength seemed to increase, the only changes
Toward age were harder lines in the shaven face
And fewer ferocities; the black passions of anger
That used to blind him sometimes had almost ceased.
Perhaps for lack of cause, now the few people
He dealt with knew him too well to cross him. And he'd
security
And rough abundance to offer.

When Martial was able
Fera led him out-doors about the house
To feel the sun. He said it had no solidness
So near the ocean. "At home in the dear cup of the hills it
used to come down
Like golden hammers, yet I'm content. Now it's dulled. Is
there a cloud?" She answered, "Cypresses planted
Around the house, but the wind has broken them so . . .
Sit on this bench by the door, here it beats golden."
He sat, and soon handled a thing beside him on the warm
plank. "What's this thing on the bench,
Like a saucer with little holes?" "An old sea-shell," she
answered, "an abalone's. They grow on the ocean-reef;
All this black soil's full of their shells, the Indians brought
up." He said: "Fera: while we stay here
Will you do something to lengthen the life you saved?
When's the new moon? Go down when the tides drain out
In the dark of the moon and at full moon, gather me mus-
sels and abalones, I'll drink the broth
And eat the meat, it is full of salts and nourishment. The
ancestors of our life came from the sea
And our blood craves it, it will bring me years of health."
She answered, "He wants us to go to-morrow." "Go,
where?"

"That I can't tell. Is the sun pleasant?" "Oh, we can't
go," he said, "you needn't be troubled. The sun
Is faint but pleasant. Now is that Cawdor passing?" "No.
Concha Rosas," she answered. "She helps the cook.
She helped me when you were sick."

Fera with private thoughts
Watched the Indian-blooded woman about her work
Pass in the dooryard, and go after a moment,
Carrying a pan under her arm, to the halved cask
Against the lift of the hill, where water trickled
From a wood pipe; tall weeds and calla lilies
Grew in the mud by it; the dark fat woman
Sat on a stone among them, paring and washing
Whatever was in the pan; and Fera said carefully:
"She has a child with blue eyes and she is an Indian.
She and the boy had their rooms in the house
When we came here, but Mr. Cawdor has moved them
To the old adobe out-building where Acanna
Lives with his wife." Her father listened or not, and
answered: "Fera,
Am I still in the sun?" "Oh? Yes." "It is faint," he said,
"but pleasant. I suppose now you can see the ocean
With golden scales on the broad blue?" "No," she an-
swered, "we face up the canyon, toward the dark
redwoods."

Cawdor's daughter Michal came by,
A blue-eyed girl of fourteen, nearly as tall as Fera.
She had a trap in her hand, and a live ground-squirrel
Dangled from it by the crushed paws. Then Fera
Left her father a moment to go with Michal
To the eagle's cage, to watch the captive be fed.

Against a cypress, a wide wire-screened box; no perch in it
But a wood block, for the bird's wing was broken.
Hood Cawdor, Michal's brother, had shot it, the autumn
Before he went away, and Michal had kept it alive.

She laid the squirrel inside and opened the trap.
The girls, their arms lacing each other's shoulders,
Set their faces against the wire to watch
The great dark-feathered and square-shouldered prisoner
Move in his corner. One wide wing trailed through filth
Quickening a buzz of blow-flies; the fierce dark eyes
Had dropped their films, "He'll never be tame," Michal
said sadly.
They watched the squirrel begin to drag its body
On the broken fore-paws. The indomitable eyes
Seemed never to have left the girls' faces but a grim hand
Came forward and gathered its prey under its talons.
They heard a whispering twitter continue
Below the hover of the dark plumes, until
The brown hackles of the neck bowed, the bleak head
Stooped over and stilled it.

Fera turned at a shadow
And saw Cawdor behind her, who said "One thing it's
good for,
It makes Michal catch squirrels. Well, Fera, you're ready
to go to-morrow?" "Let me go back to my father,"
She said, "I've left him alone too long. No, we're not
ready." He followed her; Michal remained.
She touched her father's hand and spoke of the sun.
Old Martial lifted his cloth face, that he wore
To hide the scars; his voice dulled through the cloth:
"It is faint but very pleasant. I've been asleep."

She said "Mr. Cawdor's here." And Cawdor: "How are you. Now that he's better, Fera, little Romano
(That's Concha Rosas' boy) could take him walking in the afternoons and let you have a free time
To ride with Michal. If you could stay here. It's pitiful to see youth chained to helpless old age.
However, I have to drive to Monterey in the morning. I've put it off as long as I could,
And now he's able." She looked at Cawdor's face and his hands, and said "He means, father, that we
Must go to-morrow. I told you." Who sighed and answered, "That would be a long journey for nothing at all.
Are people more kind there? Wherever an old pitiful blind man goes
Someone will have to lead him and feed him and find him a bed. The world is not so made, Fera,
That he could starve. There *is* a God, but in human kindness." Cawdor said gravely: "Now's the other fool's turn
To speak: it makes me mad to have to spread out my foolishness.
I never had time to play with colored ribbons, I was brought up hard. I did a man's work at twelve
And bossed a gang at eighteen. That gets you nowhere. I learned that ruling poor men's hands is nothing,
Ruling men's money's a wedge in the world. But after I'd split it open a crack I looked in and saw
The trick inside it, the filthy nothing, the fooled and rotten faces of rich and successful men.
And the sons they have. Then I came down from the city.
I saw this place and I got it. I was what you call honest but I was hard; the little Mexican

Cried when I got it. A canyon full of redwoods and hills
guaranteed not to contain gold.
I'd what I wanted, and have lived unshaken. My wife
died when Michal was born; and I was sorry,
She seemed frightened at the end; but life was not
changed.
I am fifty years old, the boys have grown up; and now
I'm caught with wanting something and my life is
changed.
I haven't slept for some nights. You'd think I might have
been safe at fifty. Oh, I'm still my own master
And will not beg anything of you. Old blind man your
girl's beautiful, I saw her come down the canyon
Like a fawn out of the fire. If she is willing: if you are
willing, Fera, this place is yours.
It's no palace and no kingdom: but you are a beggar. It
might be better for you to live
In a lonely place than lead your old blind-man up the cold
street
And catch dimes in his hat. If you're not willing:
I'll tell you something. You are not safe here, by God
you're not. I've been my own master;
But now I'm troubled with two wolves tearing each other:
to kneel down like a fool and worship you,
And the other thing." She whitened and smiled. "I'm not
afraid: but I'm not experienced. Marriage you mean?
There's no security in anything less. We are, as you say,
beggars: we want security." Old Martial
Groped and muttered against her. She laughed: "I'm
driving a bargain: be quiet, father." Cawdor said
sadly:
"I think that I am the one being made a fool of, old man,
not you. Fera, if you were willing

We'd drive up and be married to-morrow. And then . . .
there must be something . . . clothes, clothes: you
look ridiculous
Bursting through Michal's like the bud of a poppy." She
stood quietly and looked over the dooryard
At Concha Rosas peeling potatoes beside the fountain.
"Who's that wide-lapped dark o' the moon
Among the lilies?" He said, "Why: Concha. You know
her." "Oh, Concha. And now you've moved her out
of the house."
"Yes," he said angrily. And Fera laughing: "There is
nothing under the sun worth loving but strength: and I
Had some but it's tired, and now I'm sick of it. I want you
to be proud and hard with me; I'm not tame
If you ever soften. Oh, yes, to your offer. I'd a friend once
that had fine dreams, she didn't look forward
Into her mist of moon on the roses—not Rosas—you
remember Edith,
Father?—with half the heart that races me to meet to-
morrow." Then Cawdor shuddered with hope of love;
His face relaxing began to look like an old man's. He
stooped toward Fera, to fondle or kiss,
She drew herself back. "Not now. Oh, I'll be honest
And love you well." She took her father by the arm. "The
sun's passed from the bench, father, come in.
I'll build a fire on the hearth if you want." And Cawdor:
"That's it! You like horses, that's what I'll give you.
You liked mine but I'll buy you better; Morales has a
pair of whites as beautiful as flowers.
We'll drive by there to-morrow. Like kittens they are."
He followed her in-doors.

Blue kingfisher laughing, laughing in the lit boughs
Over lonely water,
Is there no man not duped and therefore you are laughing?
No strength of a man
But falls on folly before it drops into dust?
Go wicked arrow down to the ocean
And learn of gulls: they laugh in the cloud, they lament also.
The man who'd not be seduced, not in hot youth,
By the angel of fools, million-worshipped success,
The self-included man, the self-armored,
And never beguiled as to a bull nor a horse,
Now in his cooled and craglike years
Has humbled himself to beg pleasure: even power was better.
Laugh kingfisher, laugh, that is their fashion.
Whoever has discerned the vanity of water will desire wind.

II

The night of Cawdor's marriage, his son
Hood Cawdor lay in the north on the open sand-beach
Of a long lake. He was alone; his friend in that country
Who hunted with him, had gone to the Indian camp.
Hood slept beside his fire and seemed to awake
And hear the faint ripple, and wind in far firs,
Then all at once a voice came from the south
As if it had flown mountains and wide valleys yet clearly heard
And like a dying man's, "Hood, Hood. My son." He saw
His father's face clearly a moment after
Distorted either with pain or approach of death.
But then the actual stars of the night came through it,

Like those of a winter evening, Orion rising,
Altair and Vega going west. When he remembered
It was early autumn, he knew it must be past midnight.
He laid a flare of twigs on the live coals
Before he lay down; eyes on the opposite shore
Would have seen the sharp stars in the black crystal
Of the lake cancelled by a red comet's tail.

That night and in the morning Hood had no doubt
His father had just died, or approached death;
But dreams and visions are an obscure coinage
No sane person takes faithfully. He thought of writing
To his sister Michal; he had no habit of writing.
Months later, after the rains began and cramped
His migrant hunting, he thought not with much sorrow
Yet mournfully, of his father as dead; and thought
That he'd a share in the place unless he'd been,
As appeared likely, cut off by a written will.
No doubt it was too late to see the old man,
Yet he'd go south. He sold his horse and shot-gun, took
his rifle and went south.

He approached home
Over the hills, not by the coast-road from Monterey.
Miles beyond miles a fire had devoured,
Until he looked from the height into the redwood canyons
pitching to the ocean, these were unhurt,
Dark green and strong. Then he believed his father could
not have died.

The first canyon he entered,
A mountain-lion stood stilted on a bare slope between
alder and redwood watching him come down:

Like the owner of the place: he slid the rifle-stock to his
cheek, thinking "The hills have not been hunted
Since I've been gone"; he fired, and the lank August-
pasture-colored body somersaulted
Over the ridge; he found it lying under a laurel-bush. The
skinning was a long toil; Hood came
Burdened across the fall of twilight to the great dome of
high-cliffed granite, they call it the Rock,
That stands out of the hill at the head of Cawdor's canyon.

Here, after
the trivial violent quarrel
That sped him from home the year before, he had built a
fire at dusk hoping Michal would see it
And come to bid him good-bye; she had seen and come. He
stood now and saw, down the great darkening gorge,
The reddish-yellow windows glimmer in his father's house,
the iron-dark ocean a bank beyond,
Pricked at the gray edge with one pin-point ship's light.
Deep, vast, and quiet and sad. After a little
He gathered sticks under the oaks and made a fire on the
Rock's head, wishing Michal might see it.
If not, he could go down in the morning, (he'd blanket and
food) and see whether the place was changed.

Michal had gone in-doors but Acanna saw it,
A bright high blood-drop under the lump-shaped moon,
When he was stamping stable-yard muck from his boots
Before he went in to supper. He said to the new farmhand
Dante Vitello, the Swiss whom Cawdor had brought
From Monterey: "You seen strangers go through?
Some fellow's got a fire on the Rock." Then Michal
Hurried her meal and went out. The fire waned,

Rayless red star up the blue-shadow-brimming
Moon-silver-lipped gorge. Michal went doubtfully
Up the dim moon-path by the lone redwood that lately
Excited by her father's marriage
She'd made a secret marriage with, and a law
That she must always touch it in passing. She touched it
Without much ceremony, and climbed, and peered
Under the oaks at the man out on the Rock's head.
Oh, it was Hood, in the red ember-glow. They met
gladly;
The edge of shadow and moon-gleam down the gulf of the
canyon crept up out of sight
Under the Rock before she went home. Hood said "You'll
ask the old man whether he'd like to see me.
But tell him that I'll not stay. No plowing, I'm not a
farmer." "You're still only a hunter," she answered.

By the house under the broken cypresses;
The saffron dawn from which Hood had descended
Still hung in the V of the canyon; Cawdor with morning
friendliness, "Stay for a week if you like. Don't fear,
I won't set you at plowing, we've done the plowing. My
wife's father," he said, "has your old room,
But you can have the one on the north, used to be
Concha's." Fera Martial came out; she had changed
Amazingly from the sallow girl that Hood
Had seen two years ago at the lean farm. The eyes had not
changed. A wind blew from her eyes
Like sea-wind from the gray sea. "Here's Hood," said
Cawdor. "He looks more like you," she said, "than
either of the others."
"As long as you don't ask him to work. George works,
but this

Is only a hunter. Let him have the little north room for a
week." Hood unstrapped the raw stiffening
Puma-skin from his pack. "I owe you a wedding-present,"
he said to Fera, "if you'll take this
I'll get it tanned. I shot it yesterday." Fera took in both
hands the eight-foot trophy, she made
To draw it over her shoulders, "Stop. It's not dry, you'll
stain your dress." "Who am I," she said impatiently,
"Not to be stained?" She assumed it like a garment, the
head with the slits for eyes hung on her breast,
The moonstone claws dangling, the glazed red fleshy
under-side
Turned at the borders, her bare forearm crossing it.
"Sticky," she said and took it in-doors. "Come in."
He carried his pack, she led him up-stairs to the north
room. "This was not yours when you used to live here."
"No. Mine was where your father is now." "Then who
had this one?"
He answered "I don't remember: nobody: I guess it was
empty." "That Rosas woman," she answered, "had it.
But the bed's aired." She left him there and went down.

He went out-doors to find Michal again
And couldn't find her; he wandered about and played
with the horses,
Then Michal was coming up from the field seaward.
She carried a trap in her hand, and a live ground-
squirrel
Dangled from it by the crushed paws, the white-rimmed
Eyes dull with pain, it had lain caught all night.
"What's that, Michal, why don't you kill it?" "A treat
for the eagle.
I've taught him to eat beef but he loves to kill.

Oh, squirrels are scarce in winter." "What, you've still got
the eagle?"
"Yes. Come and watch."

Hood remembered great sails
Coasting the hill and the redwoods. He'd shot for the
breast,
But the bird's fate having captivity in it
Took in the wing-bone, against the shoulder, the messenger
Of human love; the broad oar of the wing broke upward
And stood like a halved fern-leaf on the white of the sky,
Then all fell wrecked. He had flung his coat over its head,
Still the white talon-scars pitted his forearm.

The cage was not in the old place. "Fera," she said,
"She made me move it because it smells. I can't
Scrape the wood clean." Michal had had it moved
To the only other level on the pitch of the hill;
The earth-bench a hundred feet above the house-roof,
An old oak's roots partly upheld; a faint
Steep path trailed up there. One side of the low leaning
Bole of the tree was the eagle's cage, on the other
A lichened picket-fence guarded two graves,
Two wooden head-boards. Cawdor's dead wife was laid
here
Beside a child that had died; an older sister
Of Hood's and Michal's.

They stood and watched
The dark square-shouldered prisoner, the great flight-
feathers
Of the dragged wing were worn to quills, and beetles
Crawled by the weaponed feet, yet the dark eyes

Remembered their pride. Hood said "You ought to kill
him.
My God, nearly two years!" She answered nothing,
But when he looked at her face the long blue eyes
Winked and were brimmed. The grim hand took the
squirrel,
It made a whispering twitter, the bleak head tore it,
And Michal said "George wanted to kill him too.
I can't let him be killed. And now, day after day,
I have to be cruel to bring him a little happiness."
Hood laughed; they stood looking down on the house,
All roof and dormers from here, among the thirteen
Winter-battered cypresses planted about it.

III

The next day's noon Michal said, "Her old father
Believes that food from the sea keeps him alive.
The low tides at full moon we always go down."
When Fera came they took sacks for the catch
And brown iron blades to pry the shells from the rock.
They went to the waste of the ebb under the cliff,
Stone wilderness furred with dishevelled weed, but under
each round black-shouldered stone universes
Of color and life, scarlet and green sea-lichens, violet and
rose anemones, wave-purple urchins,
Red starfish, tentacle-rayed pomegranate-color sun-
disks, shelled worms tuft-headed with astonishing
Flower-spray, pools of live crystal, quick eels plunged in
the crevices . . . the three intrusive atoms of humanity
Went prying and thrusting; the sacks fattened with shell-
vaulted meat. Then Fera said "Go out on the reef,

Michal, and when you've filled the sack with mussels call
Hood to fetch it." "Why should I go? Let *him*."
"Go Michal, I need Hood to turn over the stones." When
Michal was gone
And walked beyond hearing on the low reef, dim little
remote figure between the blind flat ocean
And burning sky, Fera stood up and said suddenly:
"Judge me, will you. Kindness is like . . .
The slime on my hands, I want judgment. We came out of
the mountain fire beggared and blinded,
Nothing but a few singed rags and a lame horse
That has died since. Now you despise me because I gave
myself to your father. Do then: I too
Hate myself now, we've learned he likes dark meat—that
Rosas—a rose-wreath of black flesh for his bride
Was not in the bargain. It leaves a taste." Hood steadied
himself against the wind of her eyes, and quietly:
"Be quiet, you are telling me things that don't concern me,
true or not. I am not one of the people that live
In this canyon." "You can be cold, I knew that, that's
Cawdor. The others have kindly mother in them.
Wax from the dead woman: but when I saw your face I
knew it was the pure rock. I loved him for that.
For I did love him, he is cold and strong. So when you
judge me, write in the book that she sold herself
For someone to take care of her blind father, but not with-
out love. You had better go out on the reef
And help Michal."

He went, and kneeling beside his sister to
scrape the stiff brown-bearded lives
From the sea face of the rock, over the swinging streaks of
foam on the water, "Michal," he said,

"I wish you could get free of this place. We must think
what we can do. God knows I wouldn't want you
Like the girls in town, pecking against a shop-window."
"What did she want to tell you?" "Nothing at all.
Only to say she loves the old man. Michal, keep your mind
clean, be like a boy, don't love.
Women's minds are not clean, their mouths declare it, the
shape of their mouths. They want to belong to someone.
But what do I know? They are all alike to me as mussels."
The sack was filled; reluctance to return
Had kept him hewing at the thick bed of mussels, letting
them slide on the rock and drop in the water,
When he looked up Fera had come. "Why do you waste
them?" she said. "You're right, waste is the purpose
And value of . . . Look, I've something to waste." She ex-
tended her hand toward him, palm downward, he
saw bright blood
Trickle from the tips of the brown fingers and spot the
rock. "You're hurt?" "Oh, nothing. I turned a stone,
A barnacle cut me, you were so long coming I thought I
could do without you. Well, have you judged me,
With Michal to help?" "Let me see the cut," he said
angrily. She turned the gashed palm cup-shape
upward
On purpose to let a small red pool gather. She heard his
teeth grating, that pleased her. He said
"I can't see," then she flung it on the ocean. "But you're
a hunter, you must have seen many a wild creature
Drain, and not paled a shade." He saw the white everted
lips of the cut and suffered a pain
Like a stab, in a peculiar place. They walked
And were silent on the low reef; Hood carried the sea-
lymph-streaming sack on his shoulder. Every third step

A cold and startling shadow was flung across them; the
sun was on the horizon and the tide turning
The surf mounted, each wave at its height covered the sun.
A river of gulls flowed away northward,
Long wings like scythes against the face of the wave, the
heavy red light, the cold pulses of shadow,
The croaking voice of a heron fell from high rose and
amber.

There were
three sacks to bring up the cliff.
Hood sent his sister to fetch a horse to the cliffhead to
carry them home, but Michal without an answer
Went home by herself, along the thread of gray fog
That ran up the great darkening gorge like the clue of a
labyrinth. Hood, climbing, saw on the cliffhead,
unreal
To eyes upward and sidelong, his head cramped by the
load, like a lit pillar Fera alone
Waiting for him, flushed with the west in her face,
The purple hills at her knees and the full moon at her
thigh, under her wounded hand new-risen.
He slid the sack on the grass and went down. His knees
wavered under the second on the jags of rock,
Under the third he stumbled and fell on the cliffhead.
They were not too heavy but he was tired. Then Fera
Lay down beside him, he laughed and stood up. "Where's
Michal? I sent her to fetch a horse." And Fera
shivering:
"I waited for you but Michal went on. My father says
that life began in the ocean and crept
Like us, dripping sea-slime up the high cliff. He used to be
a schoolmaster but mother left him,

She was much younger than he. Then he began to break
himself on bad liquor. Our little farm
Was the last refuge. But he was no farmer. We had
utterly failed
And fallen on hollow misery before the fire came. That
sort of thing builds a wall against recklessness.
Nothing's worth risk; now I'll be mean and cautious all
the rest of my life, grow mean and wrinkled
Sucking the greasy penny of security. For it's known be-
forehand, whatever I attempt bravely would fail.
That's in the blood. But see," she looked from the ocean
sundown to the violet hills and the great moon,
"Because I choose to be safe all this grows hateful. What
shall I do?" He said scornfully: "Like others,
Take what you dare and let the rest go." "That is no
limit. I dare," she answered. He looked aside
At the dark presence of the ocean moving its foam secretly
below the red west, and thought
"Well, what does she want?" "Nothing," she said as if she
had heard him. "But I wish to God
I were the hunter." She went up to the house,
And there for days was silent as a sheathed knife,
Attending her sick father and ruling the housework
With bitter eyes. At night she endured Cawdor if he
pleased
As this earth endures man.

A morning when no one
Was in the house except her father in his room,
She stole to Hood's room on the north to fall
On the open bed and nuzzle the dented pillow
With a fire face; but then sweating with shame
Rose and fetched water for some menial service

About her father's body; he had caught cold
And was helplessly bedfast again.

Meanwhile Hood Cawdor
With hunting deer at waterheads before dawn,
Evening rides with Michal, lucky shots at coyotes,
And vain lying-wait and spying of creekside pad-prints
For the great mountain-lion that killed a calf,
Contentedly used six days of his quick seven
And would have gone the eighth morning. But the sixth night
The farm-dogs yelled furious news of disaster,
So that Hood snatched up half his clothes and ran out
Barefoot; George came behind him; they saw nothing.
The dogs were silent, two of them came at call
Under the late moonrise cancelled with cloud,
But would not quest nor lead. Then the young men
Returned to bed. In the white of dawn they found
The dog that had not come in the night, the square-jawed
Fighter and best of the dogs, against the door
So opened with one stroke of an armed paw
That the purple entrails had come out, and lay
On the stone step, speckled with redwood needles.

That postponed Hood's departure, he was a hunter
And took the challenge. He found the fighting-spot,
Scratched earth and the dog's blood, but never the slayer.

IV

A sudden rainstorm
Beat in from the north ocean up a blue heaven and spoiled
his hunting. The northwest wind veered east

The rain came harder, in heavy falls and electric pauses.
Hood had come home, he sat with Michal
Playing checkers; Fera was up-stairs with her father.
The blind man had grown feebler; he had been in fact
dying since the fire; but now two days he had eaten
Nothing, and his lungs clogged. Most of the daytime
And half the night Fera'd spent by his bedside. He had
lain deeply absorbed in his own misery,
His blindness concentrating his mood, until the electric
streams and hushes of the rain vexed him,
Toward evening he fell into feverish talk of trivial
Remembered things, little dead pleasures. Fera gave
patient answers until he slept. She then
Left him and slept heavily beside her husband

The rain had ceased, Hood saw a star from
his window
And thought if the rain ceased he might give over his
hunting and go to-morrow. But out of doors
Was little promise of the rain ceasing; the east wind had
slipped south, the earth lay expectant. The house
Wore an iron stub for some forgotten purpose
Fixed upward from the peak of the roof; to one passing
out-doors at midnight the invisible metal
Would have shown a sphered flame, before the thunder
began.

Fera before
the first thunderclap
Dreaming imagined herself the mountain-lion that had
killed the dog; she hid in leaves and the hunter
Aimed at her body through a gap in the green. She waited
the fire, rigid, and through closed lids

Saw lightning flare in the window, she heard the crash of
the rifle. The enthralling dream so well interpreted
The flash and the noise that she was not awakened but
slept to the second thunder. She rose then, and went
To her father's room for he'd be awakened. He was not
awakened.
He snored in a new manner, puffing his cheeks. Impossible
to wake him. She called Cawdor. In the morning
They sent Acanna, for form's sake, not hope's, to fetch a
doctor. Hood offered to ride, Acanna was sent.
The torrents of rain prevented his return, and the doctor's
coming, to the third day. But northward
He rode lightly, the storm behind him.

The wind had shifted before dawn and
grooved itself
A violent channel from east of south, the slant of the
coast; the house-roof groaned, the planted cypresses
Flung broken boughs over the gables and all the lee slope
of the gorge was carpeted green
With the new growth and little twigs of the redwoods.
They bowed themselves at last, the redwoods, not
shaken
By common storms, bowed themselves over; their voice
and not the ocean's was the great throat of the gorge
That roared it full, taking all the storm's other
Noises like little fish in a net.

On the open pasture
The cattle began to drift, the wind broke fences.
But Cawdor, although unsure and thence in his times
Violent toward human nature, was never taken
Asleep by the acts of nature outside; he knew

His hills as if he had nerves under the grass,
What fence-lengths would blow down and toward what
cover
The cattle would drift. He rode with George, and Hood
Rode after, thwart the current in the cracked oaks
To the open mercy of the hill. They felt the spray
And sharp wreckage of rain-clouds in the steel wind,
And saw the legs of the others' horses leaning
Like the legs of broken chairs on the domed rims
On the running sky.

In the house Fera
Sat by her father's bed still as a stone
And heard him breathe, that was the master-noise of the
house
That caught the storm's noises and cries in a net,
And captured her mind; the ruling tenth of her mind
Caught in the tidal rhythm lay inert and breathing
Like the old man's body, the deep layers left unruled
Dividing life in a dream. She heard not the roof
Crying in the wind, nor on the window
The endless rattle of earth and pebbles blasted
From the hill above. For hours; and a broken cypress
bough
Rose and tapped the strained glass, at a touch the pane
Exploded inward, glass flew like sparks, the fury of the
wind
Entered like a wild beast. Nothing in the room
Remained unmoved except the old man on the bed.

Michal Cawdor had crawled up the hill four-foot
To weight her eagle's cage with heavier stones
Against the storm, and creeping back to the house

Heard the glass crash and saw the gapped window. She got up-stairs
And saw in the eddying and half blinded glimmer
Fera's face like an axe and the window blocked
With a high wardrobe that had hidden the wall
Between the two windows, a weight for men
To strain at, but Fera whose nerves found action before
Her mind found thought had wrestled it into service
Instead of screaming, the instant the crash snapped her deep trance. When Michal came Fera was drawing
The table against the wardrobe to hold it firm, her back and shoulders flowing into lines like fire
Between the axe face and the stretched arms: "Ah, shut the door," she said panting, "did Hood go with them?
He hasn't *gone?*" "Who? Hood?" "Coo if you like: has he gone?" "He went with father," she answered trembling,
"To herd the cows . . . " "Why are your eyes like eggs then, for he'll come back, Michal?" She went to the bedside
And murmured "He hasn't moved, it hasn't hurt him." But Michal: "Did you want Hood?" "Want him? I wanted
Someone to stop the window. Who could bear life
If it refused the one thing you want? I've made a shutter to hold although it sings at the edges.
Yet he felt nothing. Michal, it doesn't storm for a sparrow's death. You and I, Michal, won't have
A stir like this to speed us away in our times. He is dying". Michal answered, "Dante Vitello's
Roping the haystacks, I'll fetch him Fera?" "What could he do while the wind continues, more than I've done?
We can stand draughts. Oh Michal, a man's life and his soul

Have nothing in common. You never knew my father, he
had eagle imaginations. This poor scarred face
For whose sake neither nature nor man has ever stepped
from the path while he was living: his death
Breaks trees, they send a roaring chariot of storm to home
him.
Hood wouldn't leave without his rifle," she said,
"He didn't take the rifle when he went up?"
"Why no, not in this wind."

In the afternoon the wind
Fell, and the spray in the wind waxed into rain.
The men came home, they boarded the broken window.
The rain increased all night. At dawn a high sea-bird,
If any had risen so high, watching the hoary light
Creep down to sea, under the cloud-streams, down
The many canyons the great sea-wall of coast
Is notched with like a murderer's gun-stock, would have
seen
Each canyon's creek-mouth smoke its mud-brown torrent
Into the shoring gray; and as the light gained
Have seen the whole wall gleam with a glaze of water.

V

There was a little acre in Cawdor's canyon
Against the creek, used for a garden, because they could
water it
In summer through a wood flume; but now the scour
Devoured it; and after Cawdor had ditched the barns
Against the shoreless flood running from the hill,
In the afternoon he turned to save this acre.

He drove piling to stay the embankment; Hood pointed
The beams, and Cawdor drove them with the great
sledgehammer,
Standing to his knees in the stream.

Then Fera Cawdor
Came down the bank without a cloak, her hair
Streaming the rain, and stood among the brown leafless
And lavender shoots of willow. "Oh come to the house,
Hood."
She struck her hands together. "My father is conscious,
He wants to speak to Hood, wants Hood." Who wondering
Gave the axe to his brother and went up.

They came to the room off the short hall-
way; he heard
Through the shut door before they reached it the old man's
breathing: like nothing he'd ever heard in his life:
Slime in a pit bubbling: but the machine rhythm, intense
and faultless. She entered ahead
And drew a cloth over the wrinkled eye-pits; the bald
scars in the beard, and the open mouth,
Were not covered. "Ah shut the door," she said, "against
the wind on the stairway." He came reluctantly
Into the dreadful rhythm of the room, and said "When was
he conscious? He is not now." And Fera:
"He is in a dream: but *I* am in a dream, between black-
ness and fire, my mind is never gathered,
And all the years of thoughtful wonder and little choices
are gone. He is on the shore of what
Nobody knows: but *I* am on that shore. It is lonely. I was
the one that needed you. Does he feel anything?"
He thought, this breathing-machine? "Why no, Fera."

"It is only because I am cold," she said wringing her
hands, violently trembling, "the cold rainwater
Rains down from my hair.
I hated my loose mother but this old man was always
gentle and good even in drunkenness.
Lately I had true delight in doing things for him, the
feeding, cleaning, we'd travelled so far together,
So many faces of pain. But now he has flown away, where
is it?" She mastered her shuddering and said
"All that I loved is here dying: and now if you should ask
me to I would strike his face
While he lies dying." But he bewildered in the ice-colored
wind of her eyes stood foolish without an answer,
And heard her: "Do you understand?" He felt the wind
tempered, it fell in tears, he saw them running
By the racked mouth; she ceased then to be monstrous
and became pitiful. Her power that had held him
captive
Ceased also, and now he was meanly afraid of what she
might do. He went through the house and found
Michal,
And brought her up to the room. Then Fera lifted her face
from the bed, and stood, and answered "Come
Michal.
This is the place. Come and look down and despise us. Oh,
we don't mind. You're kind: I am wicked perhaps
To think that he is repulsive as well as pitiful to you. You
hunter with a rifle, one shot's
Mercy in the life: but the common hunter of the world
uses too many; wounds and not kills, and drives you
Limping and bleeding, years after years,
Down to this pit. One hope after another cracked in his
hands; the school he had; then the newspaper

He labored day and night to build up, over in the valley.
His wife, my shameful mother abandoned him.
He took whiskey for a friend, it turned a devil. He took
the farm up here, hunted at last
To the mountain, and nothing grew, no rain fell, the cows
died
Before the fire came. Then it took his eyes and now it is
taking his life. Now it has taken
Me too, that had been faithful awhile. For I have to tell
you, dear, dear Michal, before he dies,
I love you—and Hood for your sake, Michal—
More than I do this poor old man. He lies abandoned."
She stood above him, her thin wet clothing
In little folds glued to the flesh, like one of the girls in a
Greek frieze, the air of their motion
Molds lean in marble; Michal saw her through mist in
the eyes and thought how lovely she was, and dimly
Heard her saying: "Do you not wish you were like this
man, Hood? *I* wish I were like this man.
He has only one thing left to do. It is great and maybe
dreadful to die, but nothing's easier.
He does it asleep. Perhaps we *are* like this man: we have
only one thing left to do, Hood,
One burning thing under the sun. I love you so much,
Michal, that you will surely forgive
Whatever it is. You'll know it is not done wickedly, but
only from bitter need, from bitter need . . ."
She saw him frowning, and Michal's wonder, and cried
quickly:
"You needn't pity him! For even in this deformity and
shame of obscure death he is much more fortunate
Than any king of fat steers: under the bone, behind the
burnt eyes

There have been lightnings you never dreamed of,
despairs and exultations and hawk agonies of sight
That would have cindered your eyes before the fire came.
Now leave me with him. If I were able I would take him
up, groaning to death, to the great Rock
Over your cramp cellar of a canyon, to flame his bitter
soul away like a shot eagle
In the streaming sky. I talk foolishly. Michal you mustn't
come back until he has died, death's dreadful.
You're still a child. Stay, Hood." But he would not.

He heard in the evening
The new farmhand talking with Concha Rosas,
His Alp-Italian accent against her Spanish-
Indian like pebbles into thick water. "This country
You cannot trust, it never need any people.
My old country at home she is not so kind
But always she need people, she never kill all.
She is our mother, can't live without us. This one not care.
It make you fat and soon it cutting your neck."
Concha answered inaudibly, and the other: "You Indian.
Not either you. I have read, you come from Ah-sia.
You come from Ah-sia, us from Europa, no one from here.
Beautiful *matrigna* country, she care for Indian
No more nor white nor black, how have she help you?"
Their talk knotted itself on miscomprehension
Until *matrigna* shaped into *madrastra*.
"Beautiful stepmother country."

Hood ceased to hear them.
Why, so she was. He saw as if in a vision
The gray flame of her eyes like windows open
To a shining sky the north wind sweeps, and wind

And light strain from the windows. What wickedness in
the fabric
Was driving her mad with binding her to old men?
He went to the door to look at the black sky.
He'd leave the house to-night but pity and the rain held
him.
He heard the eaves gutter in their puddles and rush
Of rivulets washing the dark.

While he was there
She came from the stair and whispered: for they were
alone
In the dark room, the others in the lamplit room
At the table: "If I were hurt in the hills,
Dying without help, you'd not sneak off and leave me.
Oh, nobody could do that. Pull the door to
On that black freedom. Perhaps my father will die
This drowning night, but can't you see that I am a
prisoner
Until he does: the wrists tied, the ankles:
I can neither hold nor follow.
No, no, we have to let them take their time dying.
Why, even on Cawdor's, on your father's account
It would be wicked to call despair in here
Before it must come. I might do strangely
If I were driven. You'll promise. Put your hand here."
She caught it and held it under the small breast
Against the one dry thinness of cloth. She had changed
then.
He felt it thudding. "I am being tortured you know."
He shook and said "Until he dies I'll not go.
Dear child, then you'll be quieter." "When you said
child,

Your voice," she answered, "was as hard as your father's.
Hood, listen, all afternoon
I have been making a dream, you know my two white horses,
They are like twins, they mustn't be parted.
One for you, one for me, we rode together in the dream
Far off in the deep world, no one could find us.
We leaned and kissed . . . " He thrust her off, with violent fear,
And felt her throat sob in his hand, the hot slender
Reed of that voice of hers, the drumming arteries
Each side the reed flute. She went crouching and still
To the stair; he stood in the dark mourning his violence.

But she had gone up into the snoring rhythm
Neither day nor night changed. Cawdor had asked her
Whom she would have to watch with her all night,
"For you must sleep a little." She had chosen Concha
Rosas; and that was strange, he thought she had always
Hated Concha. He came at the end of evening
And brought the brown fat silent woman.

Then Fera
Looked up, not rising from the chair by the bed,
And said with a difficult smile over the waves of noise:
"I was thinking of a thing that worried my father, in the old days. He made a bargain with a man
To pasture his horse, the horse died the first week. The man came asking pay for a year's pasture
For a dead horse. My father paid it at last, I wouldn't have paid it." "No, hardly," he answered. And Fera:
"The bargain ends when the man dies—when the horse dies." She looked at her dying father and said

Shuddering: "I'm sorry to keep you up all night, Concha;
but you can sleep in your chair. He was always
A generous fool, he wasn't made for this world." Cawdor
looked down at the bed through the dull noise
Like surf on a pebble shore, and said that he'd been out to
look at the bridge; it was still standing.
The rain would break to-night, the doctor would come to-
morrow. "That would be late, if there were hope,"
She answered, "no matter." "Dear child," he said
hoarsely, "we all die." "Those that have blood in us.
When you said *child*,
Your voice," she answered, "was as hard as a flint. We
know that you and the Rock over the canyon
Will not die in our time. When they were little
children
Were you ever kind?" "Am I not now?" "Oh, kind." She
leaned sidewise and smoothed
The coverlet on the bed, but rather as a little hawk slips
sidelong from its flapping vantage
In the eye of the wind to a new field. "But about blood in
the stone veins, could Concha tell me?
Look, his face now Concha, pure rock: a flick and it
shows. Oh," she said and stood up, "forgive me.
For I am half mad with watching him
Die like an old steer the butcher forgot. It makes me
Mad at your strength. He had none: but his mind had
shining wings, they were soon broken."

When Cawdor went out
She said to Concha, "It is growing cold. Wrap yourself in
the blanket before you sleep in the chair."
When Concha nodded she went and shook her awake, by
the fat shoulder. "Did Hood make love to anyone

In those old days? They're hot at sixteen." "He never. Oh no." "You didn't serve the father and the sons?
Whom did he love?" "Nobody. He love the deer
He's only a boy and he go hunting." Fera whispered from the throat: "I wish to God, you brown slug,
That I had been you, to scrape the mud from his boots when he came in from hunting: or Ilaria Acanna
Cooking him little cakes in the oak-smoke, in the white dawns when the light shakes like water in a cup
And the hills are foam: for now who knows what will happen?
Oh sleep, cover your head with the blanket, nothing has changed."

She went about the room and rested in her chair.
The snoring rhythm took her mind captive again,
And in a snatch of sleep she dreamed that Michal
Had stolen her lion-skin, the one that Hood had given her,
And wore it in the hills and was shot for a lion.
Her dead body was found wrapped in the skin.
There was more, but this was remembered.

Perhaps the minds
That slept in the house were wrought to dreams of death
By knowledge of the old man's ebbing. Hood Cawdor
Dreamed also of a dead body; he seemed a child; at first
He dreamed it was his father lay dead in the house,
But afterwards his father held him by the hand
Without a break in the dream. They looked through a door
Into the room in which his mother lay dead.
There an old woman servant, who had now been gone
These many years, prepared his mother's body

For burial; she was washing the naked corpse.
Matrigna; madrastra. He awoke and lay in the dark
Gathering his adult mind, assuring himself
The dream grew from no memory; he remembered
His mother living, nothing of seeing her dead.
Yes, of the burial a little; the oak on the hill,
And the red earth. His thought of the grave calmed him
So that he was falling asleep.

But Fera remained awake
After her dream. How could one drive a wedge
Between the father and the son? There was not now
Any affection: but Hood was loyal: or afraid.
They had quarrelled the time before. The snatch of sleep
Had cleared her mind.

She heard the snoring rhythm
Surely a little slower and a little slower,
Then one of the old hands drew toward the breast.
The breathing failed; resumed, but waning to silence.
The throat clicked when a breath should have been drawn.
A maze of little wrinkles, that seemed to express
Surprised amusement, played from the hollow eye-pits
Into the beard.

VI

The window was black still.
No cock had cried, nor shiver of dawn troubled the air.
The stale lamp shone and smelled. Ah, what a silence.
She crossed the room and shook Concha. "Get up,
Concha.
He has died. I was alone and have closed his mouth.

Now I'll go out." She thought in the hallway,
"Besides, I am greedy to be caught in Hood's room.
We can but die, what's that. Where did this come from?"
She whispered, staring at the candle she held
Without a memory of having found nor lighted it.
She opened Hood's door and shut it behind her.

"He has died!"
No answer. Then Fera felt the tears in her eyes
Dried up with fear. "You haven't gone? Are you here
Hood?"
She saw him lifting his face from the shadows like a sea-
lion from the wave. "I dreaded
You'd slip away from here in my night. It is finished
and I
Alone was by him, your father's flitch of dark meat snored
in a corner. He has died. All the wild mind
And jagged attempts are sealed over." Her voice lifted
and failed, he saw her sleep-walker face
Candle-lighted from below, the shadow of the chin cover-
ing the mouth and of the cheek-bones the eyes
To make it the mask of a strained ecstasy, strained
fleshless almost. Herself was wondering what sacred
fear
Restrained her, she'd meant to go touch, but here desire
at the height burned crystal-separate. He said,
staring:
"Have you called my father? I'll dress and come, what
can I do?" "Do you think I will call," she said quietly,
"Cawdor?" She stopped and said: "Death is no terror, I
have just left there. Is there anything possible to fear
And not take what we want, openly with both hands? I
have been unhappy but that was foolish

For now I know that whatever bent this world around us,
whether it was God or whether it was blind
Chance piled on chance as blind as my father,
Is perfectly good, we're given a dollar of life to gamble
against a dollar's worth of desire
And if we sin we have both but losers lose nothing,
Oh, nothing, how are they worse off than my father, or a
stone in the field? Why, Hood, do you sleep naked?"
She asked him, seeing the candle's gleam on the arm and
shoulder. "I brought no night-clothes with me," he
sullenly
Answered, "I didn't expect people at night. What do you
want?" "Nothing. Your breast's more smooth
Than rubbed marble, no hair like other men in the groove
between the muscles, it is like a girl's
Except the hardness and the flat strength. No, why do
you cover it, why may I not look down with my eyes?
I'd not hide mine. No doubt I'll soon die,
And happy if I could earn that marble to be my grave-
stone. You might cut letters in it. I know
It never would bleed, it would cut hard. *Fera Martial*
you'd carve, the letters of a saved name,
Why should they fall like grains of sand and be lost
forever
On the monstrous beach? But while I breathe I have to
come back and beat against it, that stone, for nothing,
Wave after wave, a broken-winged bird
Wave after wave beats to death on the cliff. Her blood in
the foam. If I were another man's wife
And not Cawdor's you'd pity me." "Being what you are,"
he answered: he rose in the bed angrily, her eyes
Took hold like hands upon the beautiful bent shoulders
plated from the bone with visible power

Long ridges lifting the smooth skin, the hunter slenderness and strength: "being what you are you will gather
The shame back on your mind and kill it. We've not been made to touch what we would loathe ourselves for
To the last drop." She said "What were you saying? Do you think I should be shameless as a man making
Love to reluctance, the man to you for a woman, if I had time, if you were not going to-morrow?
If I just had time, I'd use a woman's cunning manners, the cat patience and watchfulness: but shame
Dies on the precipice-lip." "I hear them stirring in the house," he answered. "You lie, Hood. You hear nothing.
This little room on the north is separate and makes no sound, your father used to visit his thing here,
You children slept and heard nothing. You fear him of course. I can remember having feared something . . .
That's long ago. I forget what. Look at me once,
Stone eyes am I too horrible to look at? If I've no beauty at all, I have more than Concha had
When she was more fawn than sow, in her lean years, did your father avoid her? I must have done something
In ignorance, to make you hate me. If I could help it, would I come
Fresh from the death of the one life I have loved to make myself
Your fool and tell you I am shameless, if I could help it? Oh that's the misery: you look at me and see death,
I am dressed in death instead of a dress, I have drunk death for days, makes me repulsive enough,
No wonder, but you too Hood

Will drink it sometime for all your loathing, there are two
of us here
Shall not escape.

Oh, but we shall though, if you are willing.
There is one clean way. We'll not take anything
Of Cawdor's, I have two horses of my own. And you can
feed us with the rifle. Only to ride beside you
Is all I want. But I would waken your soul and your eyes,
I could teach you joy.

I know that you love
Liberty, I'd never touch your liberty. Oh, let me ride
beside you a week, then you could leave me.
I'd be your . . . whatever you want, but you could have
other women. That wouldn't kill me; but not to be
with you
Is death in torture." Her hope died of his look. "I know
we came from the fire only to fail,
Fail, fail, it's bred in the blood. But," she cried suddenly,
"you lie when you look like that. The flesh of
my body
Is nothing in my longing. What you think I want
Will be pure dust after hundreds of years and something
from me be crying to something from you
High up in the air."

She heard the door open behind her, she
turned on the door. Cawdor had come.
She cried "Have you waked at last? You sleep like logs,
you and your son. He has died. I can wake nobody.
I banged your door, but this one was unlatched and when
I knocked it flew open. Yet I can't wake him.

Is it decent to leave me alone with the sow Concha in the pit of sorrow?" His confused violent eyes
Moved and shunned hers and worked the room, with the ancient look of men spying for their own dishonor
As if it were a lost jewel. "How long ago did you knock? I have been awake." "What do I know
Of time? He has died." She watched him tremble, controlling with more violence the violence in him; and he said:
"I know he has died. I came from that room." Then Fera, knowing
That Hood looked like a boy caught in a crime but herself like innocence: "How did you dare to go in?
Oh yes, the dead never stand up. But how did you dare? You never once hid your contempt
While he was living. You came and cursed him because our cow died in the creek. Did he want it to die?
Then what have you done just now, spat in his face? I was not there, he lay at your mercy." She felt
Her knees failing, and a sharp languor
Melt through her body; she saw the candle-flame (she had set the candle on the little table) circling
In a short orbit, and Cawdor's face waver, strange heavy face with the drooping brows and confused eyes,
Said something heavily, unheard, and Fera answered:
"Certainly I could have gone in and called you, but I
Was looking about the house for someone that loved him. You were one of the hunters that hunted him down.
I thought that Hood . . . but no, did he care? I couldn't awake him. This flesh will harden, I'll be stone too
And not again go hot and wanting pity in a desert of stones. But you . . . you . . . that old blind man

Whom you despised, he lived in the house among you a
hawk in a mole-hill. And now he's flown up. Oh, death
Is over life like heaven over deep hell." She saw Michal in
the door. "You're here too, Michal?
My father has died. *You* loved him."

She said in the hallway,
"Are you well, Michal? I'm not; but when I slept
A snatch of the early night I dreamed about you.
You wrapped yourself in the mountain-lion skin
That Hood gave me, and Jesus Acanna shot you for a
lion."

VII

Cawdor remained behind in the room,
But Hood pretended to have been asleep and hardly
Awakened yet. Certainly he'd not betray
The flaming-minded girl his own simplicity
Imagined a little mad in her sorrow. He answered
Safe questions, but the more his intent was innocent
The more his looks tasted of guilt. And Cawdor:
"When are you going?" "To-day." "That's it? By God
You'll wait until the old blind man is buried.
What did she call you for,
Yesterday in the rain?" "She said her father
Was conscious, but when I came he was not conscious."
"Well, he's not now," he answered, his brows drooping
Between the dawn and the candle. Dawn had begun,
And Cawdor's face between the pale window
And the small flame was gray and yellow. "Get dressed,"
he said.
He turned to go, and turned back. "You were such friends

With that old man, you'll not go till he's buried."

He went and found Fera, in the room with the dead.
But seeing her bloodless face, and the great eyes
Vacant and gray, he grew somberly ashamed
Of having thought her passion was more than grief.
He had meant to charge Concha to watch her
While Hood remained in the house. He forgot that, he spoke
Tenderly, and persuaded Fera to leave
Concha to watch the dead, and herself rest
In her own room. Michal would sit beside her
All morning if she were lonely. "And Hood," he said,
Spying on her face even against his own will,
"Wanted to go to-day, I told him to wait.
Why did you call him, yesterday in the rain?"
"Yesterday?" "You came in the rain." "If that was
yesterday:
Our nights have grown long. I think my father called him,
(My father was then alive) wishing to talk
Of the Klamath country. He too had travelled. He
despised people
Who are toad-stools of one place." "Did they talk long?"
"I can't remember. You know: now he has died.
Now the long-laboring mind has come to a rest.
I am tired too. You don't think that the mind
Goes working on? That would be pitiful. He failed in
everything.
After we fail our minds go working under the ground,
digging, digging . . . we talk to someone,
The mind's not there but digging around its failure. That
would be dreadful, if even while he lies dead
The painful mind's digging away . . . " Cawdor for pity
Of the paper-white face shrunk small at dawn

Forbore then, he folded his doubts like a man folding
A live coal in his hand.

Fera returned
To her father's room; she said, "Concha, go down to
breakfast. Michal,
Leave me alone for God's sake." Being left alone she knelt
by the bed: "In that dim world, in that
Dim world, in that dim world, father? . . . there's nothing.
I am between the teeth still but you are not troubled.
If only you could *feel* the salvation."

She was mistaken. Sleep and delirium are
full of dreams;
The locked-up coma had trailed its clue of dream across
the crippled passages; now death continued
Unbroken the delusions of the shadow before. If these had
been relative to any movement outside
They'd have grown slower as the life ebbed and stagnated
as it ceased, but the only measure of the dream's
Time was the dreamer, who geared in the same change
could feel none; in his private dream, out of the pulses
Of breath and blood, as every dreamer is out of the hour-
notched arch of the sky. The brain growing cold
The dream hung in suspense and no one knew that it did.
Gently with delicate mindless fingers
Decomposition began to pick and caress the unstable
chemistry
Of the cells of the brain; Oh very gently, as the first weak
breath of wind in a wood: the storm is still far,
The leaves are stirred faintly to a gentle whispering: the
nerve-cells, by what would soon destroy them, were
stirred

To a gentle whispering. Or one might say the brain began
to glow, with its own light, in the starless
Darkness under the dead bone sky; like bits of rotting
wood on the floor of the night forest
Warm rains have soaked, you see them beside the path
shine like vague eyes. So gently the dead man's brain
Glowing by itself made and enjoyed its dream.

The nights of many years before this time
He had been dreaming the sweetness of death, as a
starved man dreams bread, but now decomposition
Reversed the chemistry; who had adored in sleep under so
many disguises the dark redeemer
In death across a thousand metaphors of form and action
celebrated life. Whatever he had wanted
To do or become was now accomplished, each bud that
had been nipped and fallen grew out to a branch,
Sparks of desire forty years quenched flamed up
fulfilment.
Out of time, undistracted by the nudging pulse-beat,
perfectly real to itself being insulated
From all touch of reality the dream triumphed, building
from past experience present paradise
More intense as the decay quickened, but ever more
primitive as it proceeded, until the ecstasy
Soared through a flighty carnival of wines and women to
the simple delight of eating flesh, and tended
Even higher, to an unconditional delight. But then the
interconnections between the groups of the brain
Failing, the dreamer and the dream split into multitude.
Soon the altered cells became unfit to express
Any human or at all describable form of consciousness.

Pain and pleasure are not to be thought
Important enough to require balancing: these flashes of
post-mortal felicity by mindless decay
Played on the breaking harp by no means countervalued
the excess of previous pain. Such discords
In the passionate terms of human experience are not
resolved, nor worth it.

The ecstasy in its timelessness
Resembled the eternal heaven of the Christian myth, but
actually the nerve-pulp as organ of pleasure
Was played to pieces in a few hours, before the day's end.
Afterwards it entered importance again
Through worms and flesh-dissolving bacteria. The per-
sonal show was over, the mountain earnest continued
In the earth and air.

But Fera in her false earnestness
Of passionate life knelt by the bed weeping.
She ceased when Michal returned. Later in the morning
She sent Michal to look for Hood and ask him
Whether he would surely stay as Cawdor had said
Until they buried her father. "Tell him to come
Himself and tell me." Michal came back: "He said
That he was not able to come; but he would stay."
At noon she saw him. She dressed and went to the table,
Where Cawdor sat and watched them. Hood shunned her
eyes;
She too was silent.

In the afternoon Cawdor came up
And said "The doctor has come." "Why Michal," she
said, "but that's a pity.

Came all the sloppy way for nothing, the doctor." "No,"
Cawdor said. "I want you to see him, Fera.
You are not well." She went and saw him, in her father's
room, where Concha with some childhood-surviving
Belief in magic had set two ritual candles burning by the
bed of death. The doctor hastily
Covered the face, the candle-flames went over in the wind
of the cloth. Fera stood quietly and said
She had no illness, and her father was dead. "I'm sorry
you've come so far for nothing." "Oh, well," he
answered,
"The coast's beautiful after the rain. I'll have the drive."
"Like this old man," she said, "and the other
Millions that are born and die; come all the sloppy way
for nothing and turn about and go back.
They have the drive." The young doctor stared; and
Cawdor angrily
Wire-lipped like one who hides a living coal
In the clenched hand: "What more do you want?" "Oh,"
she answered,
"I'm not like that"; and went out.

After the doctor had gone
She vomited, and became so weak afterwards
That Michal must call Concha to help undress her.
After another spasm of sickness her dream
Was like a stone's; until Cawdor awakened her
In the night, coming to bed. She lay rigid
And saw the fiery cataracts of her mind
Pour all night long. Before the cock crew dawn
Sea-lions began barking and coughing far off
In the hollow ocean; but one screamed out like torture
And bubbled under the water. Then Fera rose

With thief motions. Cawdor awoke and feigned sleep.
She dressed in the dark and left the room, and Cawdor
Followed silently, the black blood in his throat
Stood like a knotted rope. She entered, however,
Her father's room.

She was not surprised, no one was there
And Concha's candles had died. She fingered the dark
To find her father, the body like a board, the sheeted face,
And sat beside the bed waiting for dawn.
Cawdor, returned to his room, left the door open
To hear the hallway; he dressed, and waiting for dawn
Now the first time knew clearly for what reason
He had made Hood stay: that he might watch and know
them,
What they had... whether they had... but that was insane:
One of the vile fancies men suffer
When they are too old for their wives. She in her grief?
He had not the faculty common to slighter minds
Of seeing his own baseness with a smile. When Hood had
passed
The creaking hallway and gone down-stairs, and the other
Not moved an inch, watching her quiet dead,
Cawdor was cured of the indulgence jealousy,
He'd not be a spy again.

But Fera had heard
Hood pass; she knew Cawdor was watching; she thought
That likely enough Hood had risen before dawn
To leave the canyon forever. She sat like a stone
Turning over the pages of death in her mind,
Deep water, sharp steel, poisons they keep in the stable
To wash the wounds of horses...

VIII

Hood coming in to breakfast from the fragrant light
Before sunrise, had set his rifle in the corner by the door.
George Cawdor left the table and going out-doors
Stopped at the door and took the rifle in his hands
Out of mere idleness. Hood sharply: "Mine. Put it down!"
He, nettled, carried it with him to the next room,
There opened the outer door and lined the sights
With a red lichen-fleck on a dead cypress twig.
Hood came behind him and angrily touched his shoulder,
Reaching across his arm for the rifle; then George,
Who had meant to tease him and give it back in a moment,
Remembered a grudge and fired. The sharp noise rang
Through the open house like a hammer-blow on a barrel.
Hood, in the shock of his anger, standing too near
To strike, struck with his elbow in the notch of the ribs,
His hands to the rifle. George groaned, yet half in sport still
Wrestled with him in the doorway.

Hood, not his mind,
But his mind's eye, the moment of his elbow striking
The muscle over the heart, remembered his dream of the night.
A dream he had often before suffered. (This came to his mind later, not now; later, when he thought
There is something within us knows our fates from the first, our ends from the very fountain; and we in our nights
May overhear its knowledge by accident, all to no purpose, it never warns us enough, it never

Cares to be understood, it has no benevolence but only knowledge.) He struggled in his dream's twilight
High on the dreadful verge of a cliff with one who hated him
And was more powerful; the man had pale-flaming gray eyes, it was the wind blowing from the eyes,
As a wind blew from Fera's, that forced him to the fall
Screaming, for in a dream one has no courage nor self-command but only effeminate emotions,
He hung screaming by a brittle laurel-bush
That starved in a crack of the rock. From that he had waked in terror. He had lain and thought, if Fera should come
But yet once more pleading for love, he would yield, he would do what she wanted . . . but soon that sea-lion shrieking
From the hollow ocean thoroughly awaked him, his mind stepped over the weakness, even rubbed it from memory.
What came to him now was only the earlier dream
Mixed with its rage of fear, so that he used
No temperance in the strife with his brother but struck
The next blow with his fist shortened to the mouth,
Felt lips on teeth. They swayed in the gape of the door,
Hood the aggressor but George the heavier, entwined like serpents,
The gray steel rifle-barrel between their bodies
Appeared a lance on which both struggled impaled.
For still they held it heedfully the muzzle outward
Against the sky through the door.

Hood felt a hand
Close on his shoulder like the jaws of a horse

And force him apart from the other, he twisted himself
Without a mind and fought it without knowing whom
He fought with, then a power struck his loins and the hand
Snapped him over. He fell, yet with limbs gathered
Came up as he struck the floor, but even in the crouch
His mind returned. He saw his father, the old man
Still stronger than both his sons, darkening above him;
And George rigid against the wall, blue-faced
Beyond the light of the door; but in the light,
Behind Cawdor, Michal with pitiful eyes.
He said, "Give me the rifle." George, who still held it,
Sucked his cut lip and gave the rifle to Cawdor;
Then Hood rose and stood trembling.

But Fera on the stair behind them:
She had heard the shot and come down half way: "What
have you killed," she said, "the mountain-lion? You
snapping foxes
What meat will you take and be quiet a little? Better than
you
Lies quiet up here." But why did her voice ring rather with
joy than anger? "You deafen the ears of the dead.
Not one of you there is worthy to wash the dead man's
body." She approached the foot of the stair; her face
Was white with joy. "Poor Hood, has he hurt you? I saw
him pluck you off with two fingers, a beetle from a
bread-crumb.
It's lucky for them they'd taken your gun away from you."
Cawdor said somberly, "What do you want here? The
boys
Have played the fool, but you can be quiet." "And George,"
she answered, "his mouth is bleeding. What dreams
have stirred you

To make you fight like weasels before the sun has got up? I
am a woman by death left lonely
In a cage of weasels: but I'll have my will: quarrel your
hearts out."
Then Cawdor turned to Hood and gave him the rifle,
And said to George: "I'm going to the hill with Hood
And mark a place for the grave. Get down some redwood
From the shop loft, the twelve-inch planks, when I come
down
I'll scribe them for you. And sticks of two-by-four
To nail to at the chest corners." Fera cried "What a burial.
A weasel coffin-maker and another weasel
To dig the grave, a man buried by weasels."
Cawdor said heavily, "Come Hood." And Fera, "The gun
too?
Be careful after the grave's dug, I wouldn't trust him."
He turned in the door: "By God I am very patient with you
For your trouble's sake, but the rope frays."

They had gone and Fera said, "What would he do,
Beat me perhaps? He meant to threaten me, Michal?
The man is a little crazy do you think, Michal?"
She walked in the room undoing the dark braids of her hair.
"Why should he blame me for what I say? Blame God,
If there were any.
Your father is old enough to know that nobody
Since the world's birth ever said or did anything
Except from bitter need, except from bitter need. How old
are you Michal?"
"Fifteen," she said. "Dear, please . . . " "Oh, you'll soon
come to it.
I am better than you all, that is my sorrow.
What you think is not true." She returned up-stairs

To the still room where one window was blinded
But the other one ached with rose-white light from clouds,
And nothing breathed on the bed.

But Michal hasted
And went up the hill to look to her caged eagle.
Hood and her father, she feared, would have to move
The cage, to make room for the grave.

She returned and heard
A soft roaring in the kitchen of the house.
"Why have you got the stove roaring, Ilaria?"
"She want hot water," Ilaria Acanna answered,
"She put the boilers over and open the drafts,
I pile in wood." Fera came down. "Not boiling, not yet?
Put in more oak. Oh, are you there Michal?
Common water is fair enough to bathe in
At common times, but now. Let's look out-of-doors.
I want it hot, there are certain stains. Come on.
We'll be back when it's hot." In the wind out-doors
She trembled and said "The world changes so fast,
Where shall we go, to the shore?" Passing the work-shop
Beside the stable they heard a rhythmic noise
Of two harsh notes alternate on a stroke of silence.
Fera stopped dizzily still, and after a moment:
"Although it sounded like my father's breathing,
The days before he died, I'm not fooled, Michal.
A weasel," she said, "gnawing wood. Don't be afraid."
She entered. George lifted his dark eyes
From the saw-cut in the wine-colored redwood planks,
And Fera: "Oh, have you planed them too? That's kind.
The shavings are very fragrant.
How long will these planks last in their dark place

Before they rot and the earth fills them, ten years?"
"These never will rot." "Oh, that's a story. Not redwood
even.
There's nothing under the sun but crumbles at last,
That's known and proved. . . . Where's the other weasel?"
He looked
Morosely into her face and saw that her eyes
Gazed past him toward the skin of the mountain-lion
That Hood had given her. It was nailed wide and flat
In the gable-end, to dry, the flesh side outward,
Smeared with alum and salt. "Your brother weasel,"
She said, "Hood, Hood. The one that nibbled your lip.
How it is swollen." Not George but Michal answered
That Hood was up on the hill; "they had to move
My eagle's cage." Fera looked up at the lion-skin:
"I'll take that, George, that's mine." "Hm, the raw skin?"
"No matter," she said, "get it down. It's for my father.
What else have we got to give him? I'll wrap him in it
To lie like a Roman among the pale people.
. . . On your fine planks!" "You're more of a child than
Michal,"
He said compassionately. "When you said *child*,
Your face," she answered, "softened I thought.
It's not like Hood's." He climbed up by the work-bench
and drew the tacks,
She stood under him to take the skin, Michal beside her.
The scene in the dim work-shop gable-end
Wakes a sunk chord in the mind . . . the scene is a descent
from the cross. The man clambering and drawing
The tyrannous nails from the pierced paws; the sorrowful
women standing below to receive the relic,
Heavy-hanging spoil of the lonely hunter whom hunters
Rejoice to kill: . . . that Image-maker, its drift of metaphors.

George freed the skin, Fera raised hands to take it.
Her small hard pale-brown hands astonished him, so pale
and alive,
Folding the tawny rawhide into a bundle.
"Where's Cawdor," she said, "your father: on the hill with
Hood?"
He had gone up to Box Canyon with Dante Vitello,
Michal answered. And Fera: "Oh, but how hard it is.
Perhaps it could be oiled? It is like a board.
I'll take it to him." But Michal remained with George,
Tired of her restlessness, and afraid of her eyes.

Fera went up carrying the skin in her arms
And took it into the house. Ilaria Acanna
Came out to meet her. "Your water's boiling." "Well, let it
stand."
She laid, in the still room-up-stairs, the hard gift
Over her father's body. "Oh, that looks horrible,"
She cried shuddering and twitched it off. To hide it from
sight
She forced it into the wardrobe against the wall,
The one she had moved to block the broken window
In the wild time of storm. She stood and whispered to
herself,
And eyed the bed; then she returned out-doors,
And up the hill to the grave, in the oak's earth-bench
Above the house. The pit was waist-deep already,
And Hood was in the pit lifting the pick-axe
Between the mounds of wet red earth and cut roots.
Acanna leaned on a shovel above the pit-mouth.
For lack of room they had dug west of the oak;
The two old graves lay east. The eagle's cage
Was moved a few feet farther west; Hood labored

Between the cage and the oak. Jesus Acanna
From under the low cloud of the oak-boughs, his opaque
eyes
And Indian silence watched Fera come up the hill,
But the eagle from the cage watched Hood labor; the one
With dark indifference, the other
With dark distrust, it had watched all the grave-digging.

Fera stood among the cut roots and said,
Lifting her hand to her face: "I was worn out yesterday
With not sleeping; forgive me for foolish words.
I came up here to tell you: for I suppose
You'll go away to-night or to-morrow morning.
Well, I am taught.
I wish that when you go you'd take for a gift
One of my white ponies, they'll have to bear being parted.
Good-bye. Live freely but not recklessly. The unhappy old
man
For whom you are digging the hole, lost by that.
He never could learn that we have to live like people in a
web of knives, we mustn't reach out our hands
Or we get them gashed." Hood gazing up from the grave:
"I'm sorry. Yes, early in the morning." He glanced at
Acanna
And said, "One thing I know, I shan't find loveliness in
another canyon, like yours and Michal's." She turned
Away, saying "That's no help," and seemed about to go
down; but again turning: "I meant to gather
Some branches of mountain laurel. There are no flowers
This time of year. But I have no knife. It shouldn't be all
like a dog's burial." "I'll cut some for you."
He climbed out of the grave and said to Acanna: "I'll soon
be back. If you strike rock at this end,

Level off the floor." Fera pointed with her hand trembling:
"The tree's in the gap behind the oak-trees.
It's farther but the leaves are much fresher. Indeed he
deserves laurel, his mind had wings and magnificence
One dash of common cunning would have made famous.
And died a cow's death. You and I, if we can bear
The knocks and abominations of fortune for fifty years yet,
have as much to hope for. Don't come. I'm not
A cheerful companion. Lend me the knife."
He thought she had better not be trusted alone with it,
The mind she was in,
And went beside her, above the older graves,
He felt his knees trembling. Across the steep slope
To the far oaks. Dark aboriginal eyes,
The Indian's and the coast-range eagle's, like eyes
Of this dark earth watching our alien blood
Pass and perform its vanities, watched them to the far oaks.
But after the oaks had hidden them Acanna
Covetously examined the hunter's rifle
Left behind, leaning against the lichened fence
Of the older graves. It was very desirable. He sighed
And set it back in its place.

Fera in the lonely
Oak-shielded shadow under the polished laurel-leaves:
"Before you came
I used to come here," she caught her quivering under lip
with the teeth to keep it quiet, "for solitude.
Here I was sure no one would come, not even the deer, not
a bird; safer than a locked room.
Those days I had no traitor in my own heart, and would
gather my spirit here
To endure old men.

That I have to die
Is nothing important: though it's been pitied sometimes
when people are young: but to die in hell. I've lived
Some days of it; it burns; how I'd have laughed
Last year to think of anyone taken captive by love. A girl
imagines all sorts of things
When she lives lonely but this was never . . . Who knows
what the dead feel, and it is frightful to think
That after I have gone down and stilled myself in the
hissing ocean: roll, roll on the weed: this hunger
Might not be stilled, this fire nor this thirst . . .
For how can anyone be sure that death is a sleep? I've
never found the little garden-flower temperance
In the forest of the acts of God . . . Oh no, all's forever
there, all wild and monstrous
Outside the garden: long after the white body beats to bone
on the rock-teeth the unfed spirit
Will go screaming with pain along the flash of the foam,
gnawing for its famine a wrist of shadow,
Torture by the sea, screaming your name. I know these
things. I am not one of the careful spirits
That trot a mile and then stand."

He had bared his knife-blade to cut the
bough, enduring her voice, but Fera
Caught the raised wrist. "Let it be. We have no right. The
trees are decent, but we! A redwood cut
To make the coffin, an oak's roots for the grave: some day
the coast will lose patience and dip
And be clean. Ah. Is it men you love?
You are girl-hearted, that makes you ice to me? What do
you love? What horror of emptiness

Is in you to make you love nothing? Or only the deer and
the wild feet of the mountain and follow them
As men do women. Yet you could dip that little knife-blade
in me for pleasure, I'd not cry out
More than a shot deer, but I will never leave you
Until you quiet me." She saw that his face was gray and
strained as a spent runner's beaten at the goal.
"Will you kiss me, once, you are going away in a moment
forever? What do you owe Cawdor, what price
Of kindness bought you? This morning it was: he struck
you and flung you on the ground: you liked that?" He
gathered his strength
And turned himself to be gone. She caught him and
clung,
And fallen to her knees when he moved outward, "I swear
by God," she said, "I will tell him that you have taken
me
Against my will, if you go from here before I have spoken.
You'll not be hurt, Hood, you'll be far off,
And what he can do to *me* is no matter." He said "You
have gone mad. Stand up. I will listen." But she
Feeling at last for the first time some shadow of a power
To hold and move him would not speak nor stand up, but
crouched at his feet to enjoy it. At length she lifted
Wide staring eyes and fever-stained face. "I am very
happy. I don't know what has told me: some movement
Or quietness of yours." She embraced his thighs, kneeling
before him, he felt her breasts against them, her head
Nuzzling his body, he felt with his hand the fire of her
throat, "Nothing," he said,
"Is worse nor more vile than what we are doing." "What?
With a little . . . sin if you call it . . . kill a great misery?
No one," she thought, "ever tastes triumph

Until the mouth is rinsed with despair." She sobbed "I
have found you." But when he had dropped the knife
at the tree's root
To free his hand, and lay by her side on the drifted fall of
the crisp oak-leaves and curled brown laurel-leaves,
Then she who had wooed began to resist him, to lengthen
pleasure. "I have lighted the fire, let me warm my
hands at it
Before we are burned." The face of her exultation was
hateful to him. He thought of the knife in the leaves
And caught it toward him and struck the point of the blade
into the muscle of his thigh. He felt no pain
A moment, and then a lightning of pain, and in the lit
clearance: "I am not your dog yet," he said easily,
"I am not your thing." He felt her body shudder and turn
stone above him. "What have you done?" "A half inch
Into the blood," he answered, "I am better." He stood up.
"You will be grateful
To-morrow, for now we can live and not be ashamed. What
sort of life would have been left us?" "No life
Is left us," she said from a loose throat.
"This mountain is dry." She stood and whispered "I won't
do anything mean or troublesome. I pitied my father's
Failures from the heart, but then quietness came." Her
teeth chattered together, she said "I will now go down
If you will let me?" He followed, limping from the Attis-
gesture,
Outside the oaks and watched her creep toward the house.
The blood gliding by his knee he rubbed a handful of
earth
Against the stain in the cloth to embrown the color,
And went faintly to the work he had left.

IX

Michal
Came up after a time with meat for the eagle.
While she fed it they had sunk the grave though shallow
To the hard rock and ceased. "Have you seen Fera
Lately?" Hood asked, "she was here wanting some greens
Because there are no flowers, but seemed to be taken sick
With grief and went down." "No. I was into the house
But not up-stairs." "We'd better see how she is.
Bring down the axe and pick-axe," he said to Acanna,
"But leave the spades." He stepped short, to conceal
His lameness. Michal asked him, "What's the long stain?"
"Sap from the oak-roots, they're full of water."

They looked for Fera
All over the house and found her lying on the floor
The far side of her father's bed. Hood watched in terror
While Michal touched; he thought she had killed
herself.
He had held an obscure panic by force a prisoner
All day but now it was worse, it was a wish to be gone,
"There's nothing I wouldn't give to have gone yesterday.
Oh, pitiful child." She moved; she was not self-slain. She
rose
To Michal's tugging hands and was led to bed
In her own room, hanging back but in silence.
Toward evening she dressed herself with Concha helping
In the blue serge that was the darkest she had,
And went with the others up the hill to the burial.

A man at each corner carried the oblong box,
Cawdor and his sons and Dante Vitello. But Hood was
lame,

And when his left foot slipped on a stone his right
Failed with the weight. The stiff unseasonable
Calla lilies that Michal had found by water
Fell down the tilted lid; she gathered them up,
And when the box was lowered into its place
Dropped them upon it. Jesus Acanna had brought
The cords to use for lowering. All was done awkwardly
By shame-faced people, and the eagle watched from the cage.
The coffin grounding like a shored boat, the daughter
Of the tired passenger sighed, she leaned in the blindness
Of sand-gray eyes behind Michal toward Hood.
Her hand touched his, he trembled and stepped aside
Beyond Concha Rosas. Then Fera pressed her knuckles to her mouth
And went down the hill; the others remained.

Because of the dug earth heaped at the oak's foot
They were all standing on the west side the grave
Or at either end, a curious group, Cawdor's gray head the tallest,
Nine, to count Concha's child,
Intent, ill at ease, like bewildered cattle nosing one fallen.
Not one of them, now that Fera was gone,
Had any more than generic relation to the dead; they were merely man contemplating man's end,
Feeling some want of ceremony.

The sky had been overcast; between the ocean and the cloud
Was an inch slit, through which the sun broke suddenly at setting, only a fraction of his passing face,

But shone up the hill from the low sea's rim a reddening fire
from a pit. The shadows of the still people
Lay like a bundle of rods, over the shallow grave, up the
red mound of earth, and upward
The mass of the oak; beyond them another shadow,
Broad, startling and rectilinear, was laid from the eagle's
cage; nine slender human shadows and one
Of another nature.

Jesus Acanna
Saw something like a jewel gleam in the rays
On the heap of surface earth at his feet; he stooped
And picked it up; a knife-edged flake of wrought
Chalcedony, the smooth fracture was pleasant to feel.
He stood and fondled it with his fingers, not mindful
That his own people had chipped it out and used it
To scrape a hide in their dawn or meat from a shell.

Then Cawdor made a clearing noise in his throat
And said in heavy embarrassment: "We know nothing of
God, but we in our turn shall discover death.
It might be good to stand quietly a moment, before we fill
in the dirt, and so if anyone
Is used to praying"—he looked at Concha and Ilaria—
"might say it in their minds." They stood with their
eyes lowered,
And Cawdor took up a shovel and said impatiently
"Let us fill in." The sun was gone under the wine-colored
ocean, then the deep west fountained
Unanticipated magnificences of soaring rose and heavy
purple, atmospheres of flame-shot
Color played like a mountain surf, over the abrupt coast,
up the austere hills,

On the women talking, on the men's bent forms filling the
grave, on the oak, on the eagle's prison, one glory
Without significance pervaded the world.

Fera had gone down
To the emptied room in the vacant house to do
What she had imagined in the afternoon. In the pain of
her mind
Nothing appeared fantastic; she had thought of a way
To trick death from the hands that refused life.
From Hood's own hands. She'd not be forgotten. She
drew
The mountain-lion skin from where it was crumpled
away,
And clothed herself in it, the narrow shoulders
Over her shoulders, the head over her head.
She bound it with bits of string, and smoothed the
wrinkles.
It would fool a hunter in the twilight; only her face
Must be turned from him. She fled from the house and hid
In the oaks against the hill, not far from the door.
The rosy light had waned from the cloud, wilderness-
hearted
Twilight was here, embrowning the leaves and earth.
Concha and Ilaria and Concha's child came talking
And entered the house; kitchen windows were lighted.
The others delayed. Blue smoke began to veil out
And be fragrant among the leaves. She crouched in the
oak-bush,
As every evening the wild lives of the mountain
Come down and lie watching by lonely houses.

Hood, when they took the redwood box to the house,

Had left his rifle in the stable, he came with Michal,
Having fetched it. They walked mournfully together,
For this was their last evening, he'd leave at dawn
For the free north. But nothing remained to say;
And through their silence, drawing near the house-door,
Michal
Heard the stiff oak-leaves move, she looked and perceived
A life among them, laying her hand on his arm
She pointed with the other hand. The head and slant
shoulder
And half the side unsheathed themselves from the oak,
The hindquarters were hidden. The long beast lifted
On straightened fore-legs and stood quartering away,
The head raised, turned up the canyon. Hood held his fire,
Astonished at it, wasn't it one of the dogs?
Both dogs were splatched with white, the brindle was
dead,
No white on this, and light enough yet remained
To show the autumn color and the hair's texture;
Here were the paws that killed the brindle and the calf;
In vain hunted; chance-met.

But Fera supposed
His weapon was in his room in the house, he'd slip
Into the house to fetch it and she'd have fled
When he returned; hunting alone up the twilight hill
Might he not even now discover a woman
In the beast's hide, pity that woman? Already in her mind
She wavered away from the necessity of death;
If Michal had not been present she might have stood up
And shown . . .
The stroke that ended her thought was aimed too low.
In the hunter's mind a more deep-chested victim

Stood in the dusk to be slain; what should have
transpierced
The heart broke the left arm-bone against the shoulder
And spared the life.

He knew, as she fell. He seemed to himself
To have known even while he fired. That worm of terror
Strangled his mind so that he kept no memory
Of Cawdor and the others taking her into the house.
He was left in the dark with a bruised face, someone had
struck him,
Oh, very justly.

He rose and stood reeling
Like a boy whom bad companions have filled with
sweetened
Liquor, to make him their evening sport. The yellow
Windows of the house wavered, he fought the sickness
And went in-doors. Someone stared at him passing
Up-stairs; he heard from the door her moaning breath.
Cawdor examined the wound, George held the lamp
Over the naked arm and breast, Concha
Was dipping a sponge: it was the dark clot
Stringing from the red sponge that overcame him.
Cawdor's face, like a rock to break on, turned
To say hoarsely "You bastard, get out of this place,"
And turned back to the wound; terrible face in the lamp-
shadow
Black as the blood-clot.

He stood outside the door
Half fainting against the wall. Wanted him to go?
Good God, did he want to stay? Michal came whispering:

"You can't do anything here; and I am afraid of father.
Please go. Please go. To-morrow I'll meet you somewhere.
Oh, what can you do here?"

While he limped on the stairway
Fera's moan sharpened and became a voice.
He found himself out of doors; the blanket-roll
He had rolled ready to start to-morrow at dawn
Was in his hand. He looked for his rifle
On the ground between the shot and the mark, and
stumbled over it
After he had failed to find it.

The sky had cleared
With its local suddenness, full of nail-sharp stars
And a frosty dust of shining; he went up the dim star-path
By the lone redwood into wide night. His usurped mind
Unheeding itself ran in its track of habit,
So that he went from the oaks as before, upward
The gravelly slope of spoiled granite to the Rock.
He soon gathered dead twigs and kindled a fire
On the dome of the Rock, wishing Michal might see it
And bring him word in the morning. The night had turned
Frostily cold with its cleared sky.

X

Fera's moan became vocal, she flapped the
hurt arm, the hand
Lying still and hooked, the marbled flesh working between
the shoulder and the elbow. Michal remembered
Her eagle in the fresh of its wound waving the broken flag:
another one of Hood's rifle-shots. Cawdor

Gripped the shoulder quiet with his hand, and clinked in
the basin
From his right hand the small red splinter of bone he had
fished from the wound. Fera's eye-lids, that hung
Half open on arcs of opaque white, widened suddenly, and
fluttered shut, and stood wide open,
The liquid pools of night in the rayed gray rings dilating
and contracting like little hearts,
Each sparked with a minute image of the lamp above
them. She tongued her lips and the dry teeth
And moved her head. "This must be life, this hot pain.
Oh, the bad hunter! I fail in everything, like my father."
Cawdor looked sideways to place in his mind
The strips of a torn sheet laid ready, and smooth straight
sticks of pinewood kindling fetched from the kitchen;
He pressed a ragful of pungent liquid to the wound's
mouths. Fera lay quiet, but Michal trembled
To see her lips retract from the teeth, and hear the teeth
creaking together. Then Fera whispered:
"Horse-liniment. Of course you would. It burns." But
Cawdor answered: "Hold the lamp, Michal. George,
hold her quiet."
He gripped with his hands the shoulder and the upper
arm. Then Fera: "Oh God! Oh no! No . . . no . . .
I'll tell you anything . . . " The ends of the fracture were
heard touching; but she writhing her body whipped
over
In George's and Concha's hands; Cawdor held without
failure but her movement baffled him, the ends of bone
Were heard slipping. He shifted his grasp and said to the
others, "Loose-handed fools. Hold firm." But Fera
Straining her chalky and diminished face, the earth-stain
still unwashed on her cheek, clear of the pillow:

"Oh, please. Dearest! I'll not hide anything. I'm not to
blame." His mind was fixed on his work, yet even
While his muscles were setting themselves again her
words entered his understanding. His grip relaxed;
He looked at her face, the eyes stared bright terror but
the mouth
Attempting a fawning smile: "I'll tell you everything,
dearest, but don't torture me. I thought I had tasted
Torture before. How little I knew." Her teeth chattered
together and she said "He forced me. Hood forced me.
He threw me down under the laurel tree
And stopped my mouth with his hand. So that I couldn't
be your wife any more, darling. But I
Never loved him. I only tried to be killed. Oh, Oh, his face
Is like a nigger's. George, save me! Michal!" He sighed,
"You lie. Be quiet." "Darling," she pleaded, "I feel
Pain so much more than you understand. I can't *bear*
pain? *Bear* pain? I am not made like the people
You're used to." He wavered his head as if a fringe hung
over the eyes, and bent to the wound, but she:
"I only tried to be killed." He muttered, "I don't kill
women." And Fera: "You'd be so kind. Oh,
But the darkness was sweet." And feeling his hands, "Oh,
Concha," she cried, "I've told him everything and
yet he'll hurt me.
Dear Concha pray to him for me, he used to love you. And
I have never been mean to you because of that,
Concha." Then Cawdor suddenly turned to the Indian
woman: "Is it true, what she says?" But Michal:
"No, no,
Her mind," she stammered, "gone wrong. Ah, you coward,
Fera." "And what part," Cawdor said, "had *you* in
the play?

By God, you all . . . When?" he said hoarsely to Fera.
"Before he died," she answered, her breath hissing
In little pulses. He gathered his strength and said, "Out,
Michal." And when she had gone: "Was it in this room,
Or his?" She answered "Under the laurel tree
He threw me down: I was not to blame not to blame more
Than a murdered man is." George said, "She is lying. Her
madness is fear of pain. She is sick." "Though I've
been played
For the fool of the world I know more than that. They
make lies for pleasure but not
Get killed for pleasure. You sick whore, does it hurt? Here
is a different bed from the brown leaves
And the panting dog." Her face looking no bigger than a
broken doll's on the pillow answered: "I knew
You'd kill me, I didn't think torture, why must I suffer
alone? If I am to blame a little is he
Not rich with blame? He has got away I suppose. I swear
by God I never consented to him.
It was all violence, violence . . . Have pity: no pity?
Sweetheart: I never called you before: Sweetheart,
Have mercy on me." He stood as if to go out of the room;
he was heard breathing, and slowly his hands
Crept to his throat. He turned and came back and said:
"It is not to punish you.
I must set the bone. You can't stay here and be kept,
you'll need both arms to live with. I will use all
Gentleness: but you lie still, it will be done in a moment.
I'll send for the doctor, but when he comes
It will be too swollen perhaps for mending. Indeed I have
other business. People take pain like bread
When their life needs it. After it is set the ache
Will quiet, you'll sleep."

Michal, outside the door,
Heard her screaming and went in; but then she had fainted
And Cawdor worked more easily. He bound the arm
And set the splints, and bound it again, and passed
A leather belt about her body to fasten it
Against her side. He looked then at her face,
The dark lashes lying still, the parted white lips
Pencilled at the borders with fine blue lines,
Meek as a child's after the turn of fever
Folds its weakness in sleep. Concha prepared
To bathe the face, but Cawdor: "Let her alone.
Let her have the poor mercy while it lasts.
Come George, I'll help you saddle. He'll come sooner
For you than another." He spoke quietly, but leaving
The room he walked against the wall by the door
And spread his hands both ways to feel the door-frame
Before he went out. He ran and found Hood's room
Empty, before he went with George to the stable.
"I think it has cleared," he said in the dark, "aren't the stars out?"
He saw the red star of Hood's fire on the Rock.
"Take your pick of the horses: I must go back
And warn the women: she will wake in delirium
And strain the bandages loose: I didn't speak of that,
That I remember? That I remember? Good-night,"
He said eagerly. He turned, then George went down
Alone, but Cawdor up the hill to the Rock
As one tortured with thirst toils up the sand-hills
To the known rock spring. When he issued from the oaks
On the ridge of the steep neck of air-crumbled granite

The canyon redwoods were a stain of black shade
In the pit below, the gleam-powdered sky soared out of
conception,
The starlight vastness and steepness were narrow to him
And no wind breathed. He was like one threading a tunnel
With anguished hunger of the air and light, all the arrows
Of desire strung to their heads on the pale spark
Of day at the end: so all the needs of his life
Hung on the speck of humanity by the red embers
On the rock dome. It heard him, and twitched and stood
up.
He made in his mouth and waterless throat the words
"Come down," but no sound issued; he came nearer and
said
"What did you steal? Come down." Hood screamed
"Keep off,"
The same panic of brainless fear returning,
With a horror of his own cowardice, how could he bear
To run, but how could he bear to stand? He imagined
Fera had died. His very innocence of evil
Made the avenger unbearable, one of those hands
Could break his body, he snatched his rifle and stood
On the other side of the embers and sobbed "Stop there.
By God if you come nearer I'll fire. Keep off your hands.
I'm not hiding, I'll answer the law, not you.
I can't . . . Keep off. Oh! Oh!" For Cawdor blindly
Came through the fire; Hood with the rifle at his waist
Unshouldered, flung up the muzzle and shot in the air
Over his father's head: at the flash Cawdor
Felt a bright fear, not of death but of dying mocked,
Overreached and outraged, as a fool dies,
Explode on his mind like light breaking on blindness
So that the body leaped and struck while the mind

Astonished with hatred stood still. There had been no
choice,
Nor from the first any form of intention.
He saw Hood's body roll away from the fire
Like a thing with no hands; he felt in the knuckles
Of both his hands that both had been bruised on bone,
He saw Hood's body twist on the fall of the dome
Over the precipice and hands like weak flames
Scratch at the starlight rock: then one sharp moment's
Knife-edge a shadow of choice appeared: for all
Passed in a moment: he might have dived prone
And clutched after the hands with his hands: more likely
Gone down the granite slide into the gulf
With the other: but the choice had no consciousness
And in a moment, no choice. There was no cry.
The curving hands scrabbled on the round of the rock
And slipped silently down, into so dreadful a depth
That no sound of the fall: nothing returned:
Mere silence, mere vanishing. Cawdor could hear the water
Whispering below, and saw the redwood forest
A long irregular stain in the starlit gorge-bottom,
But over the round of the rock it was not possible
To see the foot of the Rock. A little steady breeze
Blew curving up over the granite verge
From the night's drift in the chasm.

He turned and walked
Stealthily away, yet firmly, feeling no horror
But only a hollow unbearable sadness. But Hood had
earned
The death he had got: not that he'd used violence
In adultery, that was incredible, the woman had lied:
But the crime however invited had no forgiveness,

Not even in death. Women are not responsible;
They are like children, little children grown lewd;
Men must acknowledge justice or their world falls
Piecemeal to dirty decay. Justice had been
Performed. He felt the sapping unbearable sadness
A little lightened, so muttered "Justice. Justice.
Justice": but the third time of saying it the word
Was pithed of meaning and became useless. He had come
Half way to the house and there remembered the things
Left on the Rock. He returned. Only his knowledge
Of what lay at the foot prevented him then
From casting himself down. Nor could he cast the rifle,
The silly rifle that Hood had loved,
For fear of its falling on the poor damned face.
He stood between the blanket-roll and the rifle
Beside a few burnt sticks and scattered red coals
On the bulge of the Rock. "Well, I have killed my son."
Whether he continued living or quit living,
It would be a pity Michal should know. Quit, because it
hurts? He thought he was not the make to do that.
His recent real temptation appeared a contemptible
flourish of play-acting. "Well, I have killed my son.
He needed killing." The woman's story of the rape was
now believed; it had become needful
To believe her story. "I will take these and bury them
with him." When he'd again gone under the oaks
He heard one coming up the dark path. A moment of
stupid horror he dreamed it was Hood coming
To claim the rifle. But Michal, no doubt, Michal. He laid
the things he carried into the darkness
Of the oaks by the path, and hardened his mind to meet
Michal. Meet . . . whom? It brushed against the stiff
leaves

Like something broken that crept and rested. With no
terror but pity going down in the dark to meet it
He heard it snort and stamp hooves, a stray horse plunged
from the path. "God damn you," he said and a voice
answered
From down the path: "Hood, is that you?" She had been
coming up to the Rock, and the strayed horse
Drifting ahead. She said "One of the horses: I guess it's
gone. O Hood, Fera has said
Frightful . . . where are you?" She cried sharply "Who is
that?" "The things were true," he answered, "all
true." He heard her
Stop, and he seemed to feel her trembling. "Where's
Hood," she said in a moment, trembling, "what have
you done?"
"Nothing." He said in his heart "Well: I have killed
him?" He possessed his voice in quietness and said,
"I came
To ask him the truth, and he has confessed. It was all
true." She sobbed and said "What have vou done
with him?"
"Nothing," he answered indifferently. "He ran when I
came. A guilty conscience, Michal. He has done a
thing
Never forgiven." He had reached her now; in the starless
night of the oaks he saw the gleam of her face
Retreating, she moving slowly backward before him. He
said "Like the scut of a deer." "What?" "When I
came
He streaked up the hill into the starlight." "How did you
make him confess?" "Oh Michal, a guilty conscience.
That does it. You know he wasn't a coward by nature, not
a damned coward. I saw him run like a rabbit-scut

Between the hill and the stars. Come up to the Rock and
call him." "I thought I heard a gun-shot," she
faltered.
"I was in the house with . . . Then I went out." "A gun-
shot? No. Come up and call him; perhaps he'll come
down.
I promise you not to touch him. Come up and call to him,
Michal. If you call loudly." They climbed to the Rock.
She saw it was vacant, the ends of a few sticks glowed on
the stone, pale in their ash-crusts. "Hood. Hood,"
She called, and he said "Call louder. He has gone far."
She answered,
"No, I won't call. I wish never to see him."

Who lay under the sheer below them, his broken shoulders
Bulging his coat in lumps the starlight regarded.
The bone vessel where all the nerves had met
For counsel while they were living, and the acts and
thoughts
Been formed, was burst open, its gray and white jellies
Flung on the stones like liquor from a broken flask,
Mixed with some streamers of blood.

The vivid consciousness
That waking or dreaming, its twenty years, infallibly
Felt itself unitary, was now divided:
Like the dispersion of a broken hive: the brain-cells
And rent fragments of cells finding
After their communal festival of life particular deaths.
In their deaths they dreamed a moment, the unspent
chemistry
Of life resolving its powers; some in the cold star-gleam
Some in the cooling darkness in the crushed skull.

But shine and shade were indifferent to them, their dreams
Determined by temperatures, access of air,
Wetness or drying, as the work of the autolytic
Enzymes of the last hunger hasted or failed.

Yet there appeared, whether by chance or whether
From causes in their common origin and recent union,
A rhythmic sympathy among the particular dreams.
A wave of many minute delicious enjoyments
Would travel across the spilth; then a sad fading
Would follow it, a wave of infinitesimal pains,
And a pause, and the pleasures again. These waves both
lessened
In power and slowed in time; the fragments of
consciousness
Beginning to lapse out of the frailties of life
And enter another condition. The strained peace
Of the rock has no repose, it is wild and shuddering, it
travels
In the teeth of locked strains unimaginable paths;
It is full of desire; but the brittle iniquities of pleasure
And pain are not there. These fragments now approached
What they would enter in a moment, the peace of the
earth.

XI

When Cawdor had left the house, Concha
At once busied herself to recall to life
The milk-faced bandaged one on the bed, then Michal
Had intervened: "He said to let her alone.
He said to let her have peace." But Concha: "She stay
Fainting too long, she stop breathing, she die."

"I think that would be better." But the Indian woman
Trembling went on, then Michal held up the basin
While the other bathed the pale face, gray jewels of water
Ran down in the hair. There was no response; then Michal
Herself began to be frightened. She knew that her father
Had kept a bottle of whiskey somewhere in the room;
She set the basin on the blue chair and went
Searching on shelves.

Concha flung back the sheet
And blanket to bathe the breast. How the hard strap
That held the arm furrowed the flesh of the waist.
The fine-grained clear white skin was beautiful to her;
The coins of rose about the small nipples
Astonished her; hers were as black as the earth; she
dipped her head
As if to a flower's fragrance and felt the quiet breasts
She had cooled with water move on her face: Fera
Moaned and then said faintly, "You are blind, father.
Both horses were white." She moved her head on her hair,
Her voice changed: "Do you love me, Concha? You never
were jealous,
I've wondered at you. Where's Cawdor?" Michal returned
And said sullenly: "I've found it, and there's no glass.
She'd better suck from the bottle." But Fera lay
Regardless of her, and dropping her right forearm
Across her breast, explored the splints, and folds
On heavy folds of linen that shelled the shoulder
And the left arm; then with pain-dwindled lips,
"Well," she said, "give it to me. It's time for me now
To taste of my father's friend. Help me sit up, Concha."
She sipped and choked; it spilled on her chin, the burning
fragrance

Filled all the room. Michal took back the bottle
And said, "Why did you lie? You lied. You lied
Horrible things." Fera, dull-eyed, with racked mouth,
The coughing had hurt her arm: "Not lies. Every word
Faithful as death. I lay between your father and your
brother
Like a snake between the rock and the stone.
Give me the bottle, give it back to me Michal.
I have to hush this torment. Your father'll come back.
And beat me with his fists like a wild beast,
He's like a beast in his rages." "Every word's lies.
But if it were true, why did you tell him?" "Because he
tortured me."
Michal crossed the room to the corner and saw
In the east window high up in the dark pane
A little drop of red light. She pressed her face
Against the glass and cupped it with her two hands
To shut the lamplight away. Hood's waning fire,
Like a red star under the diamond stars.
"I'll go and ask him," she said turning. "He'll tell me
Every last word was a lie." "What did you see, Oh what
did you see, Michal?"
Fera said shaking, "A fire on the Rock? It's only some
vaquero from inland, Hood wouldn't build one,
Not to-night, not to-night." She answered "I saw nothing.
I saw the sky and some stars. Concha,
Take care of her, will you. Get her to sleep." As Michal
crossed to the door a dim noise like a gun-shot
Seemed to be heard, she said "Oh, what was that?
Concha: you heard it? Listen." But Fera laughing
With an ashen face: "Lived here all her life long
And never has heard a wave slapping the sand at the
creek-mouth."

When she'd gone out, Fera said: "Concha,
My father's blindness was crystal to hers. How could she
stay in the room and let Cawdor go out
To find his prey in the night? Did she know *nothing?* Give
me the bottle, dear Concha. Dear Concha." She
drank,
And said: "I'd no other way to keep him, he was going
away. Poor hunter. I set a beast on his track
That he's no match for. The gun's no good, boy hunter,
you might as well toss acorns. Two bulls, Concha,
Fighting by starlight, the young one is gored. Ah: Concha:
One of my loves was locked in the hill by the oak, now the
other's safe too. Listen: my birthday's to-night.
Has to be kept," she stammered, "I've told no one but
you. And here's my father's friend to sit up with.
Go down and get two glasses, Concha, and a pitcher of
water." She called her back from the door. "Concha!
The water in the house is all stale.
Go out to the spring among the calla lilies
And fill the pitcher. Don't hurry, Concha, I'm resting
now."

As Concha went out Fera stealthily
Undid the belt that locked her arm to her side; when the
Indian was gone
She passed one-handed the strap through the buckle, the
tongue thrown back
To let it slide free. She knotted the end of the strap
To the top of the carved bed-post, kneeling on the pillow,
Tightening the knot between her hand and her teeth.
She dropped the collar about her neck, and shuffled her
knees
Until they slipped from the mattress. The right arm

Sustained the left one, to ease its pain in the fall.
She could have breathed by standing, but while her mind
Remained she would not, and then was unable.

Concha, down-stairs,
Had much to tell Ilaria. Acanna was there too
In the kitchen, and Concha's boy Romano, and Dante
Vitello, the Swiss. All questioned her. She'd forgotten
The water and found the glasses, when little Romano
In his child voice: "Escucha: un raton.—Listen mother,
A mouse in the ceiling." But no one looked up nor down
Until he fetched the gray cat from under the stove
And wanted to take her up-stairs. Concha forbade him,
But listened, and heard the noise in the ceiling change
From a soft stroking to a dull shudder in the wood.
The shudder was Fera's agony; the backs of her feet
Stroking the floor; she hung as if kneeling. But Concha
said:
"A trade-rat maybe: no mouse. But I must go up."
The noise had ceased.

She screamed in the hallway above
And flung the glasses on the floor. The people below
Stared at each other. Her cries were timed, rhythmic,
Mechanical, like a ground-squirrel's when he sits up
Beside his burrow and watches a dog hunting
On the other side of the fence. At length Acanna
Ran to the stair, the others followed, and little Romano
With gray puss in his arms. They looked past Concha,
Who stood in the door not daring to enter.

The girl
Appeared kneeling, only her knees were lifted

A little above the floor; her head devoutly
Drooped over. She was naked but the bandaged arm;
The coins about the small nipples were now
As black as Concha's; the lips dark, the fine skin
Mottled with lead-color. Ilaria pushed in and lifted
The body, Jesus Acanna then found his knife
And cut the strap. They stretched the slender body
On the bed and began to talk, but Dante Vitello
Remembered at length to pump the ribs with his hands.
They saw the lids of the eyes after a time
Flutter and close; the Swiss paused from his labor,
The breathing went on by itself.

Cawdor returned
From the Rock with Michal, but would not enter the
house.
He seemed going toward the sea when she left him. He
went
As far as the work-shop and fetched tools for digging,
A lantern, matches to light it. He chose the tools
With a clear mind; this work had to be done
Because of the coyotes. It proved more dreadful
Than he'd imagined; but when it was done the
dreadfulness itself
Had purged his mind of emotion. He took no pains
To conceal the grave, for at this time discovery
Meant nothing to him, he desired nor feared nothing,
Not even to put back time and undo an act.
However, no person ever went up there.
He rolled stones on the grave against the coyotes,
And gathered the tools, but when he had carried them
Half way home, he threw them with the lantern too
Into the creek under the starless redwoods.

His mind ceased there, as if the tools had been strings
Between the world and his mind; these cut, it closed.

In the bright of dawn, before sunrise began,
The lank steers wheeled their line when he waved his arms.
He cursed them with obscene words . . . but why? . . . and
there stood
Thirty in a row, all in a row like soldiers
Staring at him with strained-up heads. He was in the
pasture
On the highest dome of the hill.
Wild fragrant wind blew from the burning east,
A handful of cloud high up in the air caught fire and
vanished.
A point of more excessive light appeared
On the ridge by the lone oak and enlarged.
Without doubt, the sun. But if it were the horn of a
flaming beast:
We'd have a horned beast to see by.
"What have I lost by doing through a blind accident
What I ought to have done in cold blood? Was Hood
anything to me?
I have lost nothing." He'd have counted Fera
Lost, if he'd thought of Fera; she did not enter his mind.
"If I'd lost much: it's likely I'd not lie down
But gather again and go on." His flesh and bones were
soaked
With aching weariness: but that was nothing either.
His eyes dazzled in the rivers of light
And the sea lay at his feet flat and lifeless
Far down, but flecked with the steps of the wind. He went
down to the house
And heard that Fera had hanged herself and been saved,

But that was nothing either. No, something. "Where were you?"
He said to Concha. "She send me down. She send me.
She send me down for water. When I come back: Oh!"
"I'll not see her this morning," he answered.
"Bring my clothes to the little room on the north,
And change the bed there. Hood's gone for good." He had done justly,
And could sleep very well there.

Two days passed
Before he remembered the blanket-roll and the rifle
Dropped in the oaks when Michal came. He went and sought
But never found them. But that was nothing either.

XII

Her voice was still roughened with an off whisper
In the bruised throat, and the white of one of her eyes
Grained with a drop of red, a little blood-vessel
Had broken there when the strap drew. When she was alone
She lay pointed on the bed, stiffened to the attitude
Of formal death, feeling the ache in her arm
But hardly conscious of it, the hours and scenes
And the form as a whole of all her life incessantly
Moving behind the blank wide open eyes.
She lay and contemplated it with little emotion
And hardly a thought. She thought of herself as dead.
Although she knew perfectly that she was living,
And had said to Concha: "You needn't watch me, you and Ilaria.

I'll never try death again, now I understand
That to fail is the very soul of my soul.
Failure is not so sweet that one who feels it
Beforehand will go running to meet it again.
Though death is sweet. That will come in its time,
When I'm as old as my father, I fear not sooner;
Never for the asking."

She said to Concha another day:
"I wish you could get Michal to come and see me;
Or George even. Not one soul has come in,
Not since the doctor was here, and death is so lonesome.
I could get up, but when I begin to walk
Cawdor will send me away. You must never tell them
That I can get up." This was at noon; Concha
Painfully made a slow thought in her mind
All afternoon, and said to Cawdor in the evening,
Stammering, because her words were planned beforehand:
"She say that she is well enough to get up."
"Who says?" "Oh . . . she . . . " "You mean," he said
frowning,
"My wife? Let her get up then." She turned sadly, and
then said:
"When she get up you going to send her away?"
"What is that to you?" Then Concha recklessly: "You
keep her
After she loving with Hood?" She curved her body
In fear of his hand; but he took hold of her wrist
And drove her up the stairway to Fera's room.

Who lay in the bed straightened to the shape of death
And looked at them with still eyes; the scarlet drop
In the white of the left one spoiled her eyes' peace. Cawdor

Put off the questions that had burned him to ask,
And stood still and then said: "You are well enough to
get up,
Concha says, but you think I'd send you away."
She smiled at Concha. "I wondered whether you'd do it.
And then I thought you wouldn't, but it's no matter.
No: you won't send me," she said to Cawdor, "for I
Suffered my destruction in simple innocence.
Oh, certainly you'll not drink again from a mouthed
cup,
But the cup's not blamed. You are much too just to punish
the cup. There are more reasons." His face a moment
Was like her father's a scar; it formed itself to be dark
metal again and he said: "No doubt
You were loving with him and so he went mad." She
thought, and answered: "No. You did justice. I know
what you did.
You'd better send out your brown tattle-tales
Before we say any more, she'd hear and go tell, wouldn't
you Concha? Besides that her sour odor
Poisons the room. I've noticed lately, the living smell
much worse than the dead. Oh, never mourn them;
No one was ever sorry to have died." He shook his head,
like the bull that has charged a man and found
Only the vacant flapping of a red blanket, and he said:
"Be straight will you for once, I won't hurt you.
You hide in a smoke of words like lies. Perhaps"—his face
hollowed with terror—"it was all a lie?
No, that can't be. You white poison, you were in the boat
with him and lied
To save your skin?" He turned on Concha: "Did you see
her make love to him?" But the Indian woman feared
to go on;

She shook her head, and looked aside at Fera, and shook her head. Cawdor made himself patient
And said, "Perhaps a kiss: or you saw her stroking his head: he had fine hair . . . " Fera lay faintly
Smiling and watched him; he looked, stooping his face to Concha's, like a tall old Jew bargaining, and said:
"Or you saw them . . . by God, you told me they kissed, you said that." She nodded her head, panting and shrinking backward,
Wiping her dark hands on her apron incessantly; and Fera: "She'll tell more lies if you make more faces,
And when that fails you could pinch her arm. How can you expect truth from such people, they're all afraid of you?"
He looked at Concha and said feebly: "If I could know.
I am stupid and things are hidden. What I have done. Was right, but the blood rushes me behind my eyes
And God sends chance. It all happened in the blindness of chance." Fera said quietly "Don't talk before her."
He looked at her eyes and said, "You have the secret, if I could trust you. That red drop comes from hanging
And will clear up. You seem quieter in mind
Than ever before. Do you know where I sleep now? Hood's room." "It was Concha's first." He groaned in his throat, feeling
That every thought in her mind was impure, how could he fish the truth from a dirty fountain? He said:
"And yet you'll tell me. It will make no difference to you but only to me. I will do nothing to punish you,
Whatever you say, nothing in your favor either." "I've told you already," she answered. "But whether you tempted him,

Invited him, you egged him on, you thought he was safe.
A word: or only a damned smile: women
Can move hell with their eyes." She closed her eyes, and
said, keeping them closed: "What I said that night
Each word was true. You're right though, I've still a
secret. Shoo tattle-tales out,
And then I'll tell you my secret." He said, "Concha: get
out." She sighed and went out gladly, and Fera:
"Open the door; I won't have her at the door." However
the hallway was empty, and Fera said:
"I was friendly with him, he was your son and Michal's
brother. I never in act nor look nor thought
Stepped over that. Was he vicious when he was little? I
never knew it. A beast lived in his blood,
But no one warned me and now he is gone." "That's the
word: gone. You are safe to blacken him, he can't
answer."
"If I should lie and whiten him," she said,
"And say he was innocent, some stitch of his nerves in
him destroyed me but his heart was innocent: and
you believed it:
How could you sleep? And after a night or two
That room you have taken might seem too little for you.
You are very strong, you'd hold yourself quiet three
night,
Or four nights, and then wander on the hill scaring the
cattle." He said gravely, "Does every one know?
Who told you this?" "No one," she answered. "And after
a week of nights they'd find you with those big-boned
Fingers clenched in your throat quiet on the hill." "On
the Rock," he said. "Oh, on the Rock. But since . . .
Or under the Rock. But since he was guilty you can sleep
sound." The flesh of his face, that had sagged lately,

Was now become firm for danger, and he asked: "How do you know these things if no one watched me?" She answered,
"I know you so well. I used to be near you, if you remember, before I was spoiled. And now, lying
Like this"—she lay pointed in the bed, her arms on her breast—"I mean alone and cut off from life,
I've had leisure and power to think of you plainly, so all your acts that night stand in my mind
Fixed and forever like pieces of stone. That's the way with us dead, we see things whole and never
Wonder at things." He said, "You lie here and dream and imagine. There's nothing in it." "So you won't send me,"
She answered, "to stay with strangers. I know too much and might tell: that's nothing to you: but as time darkens
You'll find me the only comforter you have. And I can teach you the way to blessedness: I've tasted life
And tasted death; the one's warm water, yellow with mud and wrigglers, sucked from a puddle in the road,
Or hot water that scalds you to screaming;
The other is bright and cool and quiet, drawn from the deep. You knocked the scummed cup from the boy's hand
And gave him the other: is that a thing to be sorry for? I know; I have both in my hands; life's on the broken
And splinted left, so I never lift it. You did kindly, not terribly. If you were wise, you'd do
As much for yourself. If you were loving you'd do
As much for me." He stood and listened, and said "Is that all?"
She nodded. "Then it's not much.

I see there are two of us here twisting in hell,
Smile as you like." "Why yes," she answered, "by the
left arm.
That's true. But I taste both." He was leaving the room
And she cried after him: "Oh my dear, dear, be merciful.
Life is so tough to cut, I never would have dreamed.
I fail. But nothing stops *you*."

He went out-doors
And felt a seeming-irresistible desire
To go to the foot of the Rock and lie with those stones
On the soft earth, his mouth whispering against it.
But now, he must never give in to any desire;
Strain the iron forever. Never do anything strange:
For even now their eyes followed him strangely.
No matter; they'd keep in subjection; they might have
watched it
And not dare speak: but a pity if little Michal . . .
The stars in the sparse boughs, the skies are never
Darkened any more, a naughty glitter.
How does one commonly spend a winter evening:
Not letting the stars glitter through the split boughs.
He entered the house and sat down. Strain the iron forever:
He had strength for that.

Fera had little strength,
And the long hollow night coming looked unendurable.
Her right arm was flung free of the cover and lay
Bent on her eyes; after a while her teeth
Found the wrist: ugh, what was this? She raised it and
saw
The yellow and brown scabs of the laceration
Where she had gnawed it before.

In the morning, when Concha
Came in to serve her, she said "Did you believe in heaven
and hell
When you were little? (To-day I'll get up,
I've had enough of this bed, you'll help me dress.)
Because you know the dead rarely come back;
But I died and came back, and I can tell you
More than the priests know. Dying's not bad: Oh, bad
enough,
But you can stand it, you have to. But afterwards . . . Ah,
there's . . ."
She moaned, her tight small fist crept up to her cheek
And trembled there. She was playing a comedy, she
played it so well
Her own flesh suffered and chilled. "Death is no sleep,
Concha, death is eternal torment and terror
For all that die. Neither is there any heaven for anyone. I
saw my father there crying blood
From the hollows of his blind eyes and tearing his beard
with his hands. He said 'Oh my God have you come,
Fera?
Who ever dreamed that death could be worse than life?'
I said 'It is so,' and all the crowd of the dead
Began moaning 'It is so.' But then you managed to make
me breathe with your hands and I could come back,
They said to me then, 'Never tell any living person what
death is like, for if they imagined
What it's like, for they all must come, how could they live?
Who'd not go mad with fear to feel it approaching? '
Oh Concha, hug life with tooth and nail, for what
Comes after is the most horrible. And no end, no end.
(Come here and help me. We'll have to slit down the sleeve
And pin it over the shoulder.) I didn't tell you

To scare you, Concha. Don't think about it. Ah no,
Or we'd sit screaming.
I wasn't going to tell you but then I thought
That you can bear it as well as I can, after the trick
You played me last night, my rival!
Live. Live forever if you could. Oh it was frightful."

XIII

Though she was up, and began to live and go out,
She avoided Cawdor's presence, still fearing to be sent
away
If seen too often. She kept her room at meal-times,
And he was almost never about the house
The other hours of the day.

The first time she went out,
She only walked under the storm-broken cypresses
About the door and went in; but the next morning
She climbed the steep to the great oak by the graves.
Still weak and bloodless, dizzy with climbing, she lay
Face down on the dug earth, her mouth breathing against it
And whispering over her father's body below.
The grave retained its freshness, no rain had fallen
On the red earth. She heard after a time
A rustling and scraping noise and raised her head.
It was Michal's eagle hungrily astir in the cage;
She used to feed it about this time. Fera
Saw beak and eyes in the shadow, and the dark square
Of the box cage against the bright blue shining
Flat ocean and the arch of sky. She stood up, and walked
About the oak's bole; she seemed to be counting the
graves,

But there were only three; the two ancient ones
Enclosed with pickets and the raw new one unfenced.

Michal came up with flesh and water for the eagle,
But Fera stood on the other side of the oak
Until she had come; then, coming forward from it:
"Why Michal, how strange to think that all these days,
No matter what's happened, you still go on steadily as
sunrise.
My father dies of old age, I fish for death
And catch failure again, and Hood . . . but you and the
sunrises
Go on as if our tears and our deaths were nothing.
He isn't glad to see you: I'd have been glad to see you,
My lonely days in bed, but you never came."
Michal had looked over her shoulder, her face
Growing white as it turned. She turned back to the cage.
"I didn't know you were here," she said, and poured out
The dirty water from the drinking-basin
Without turning again. "I see that you hate me,"
Fera said; "we'll not speak of that. I see that your father
Has thought *my* father's grave not worthy of a mark.
If the cold charity of the county had buried him
There'd be a stake with his name.
Yet he was here like a man among cattle,
The only mind in this ditch." Michal said nothing,
But rubbed the white slime from the basin and rinsed it,
And Fera said, "The oak's dying, they chopped its
roots.
Or was it the storm that burned these baby leaves?
We ought to be friends, Michal." Michal set in
The filled basin and shut the door of the cage.
She opened her lips to speak, and then kept silence,

And Fera said, "You'll listen, my dear, if you won't speak.
Do you think I'll swallow
These white and hating looks as if they were earned?
What have I done? Tried to die? Yes; I tried twice;
And that was stupid, but people are pitied for that, not
hated. You were quite kind my days of sunshine,
And now you peck the feathers from the sick bird."
Michal said trembling, "Oh, no. Not that I'm spiteful,
Only, I can't understand." "That's true," she answered,
"how could you?
Your life has been sweet and full of ignorance. But I, when
my father was drunk in town, would hear my mother
Take lovers in the house. *There* was somebody to hate.
Yet they were white men;
They weren't the color of Concha . . . no more of that. The
second time I died I almost made it, you know.
They pumped me alive with their hands and I was born
again
From the dark air: since then I can understand much that
was dark before. So you, Michal,
Will understand . . . many things that are dark . . . when
some wild night kills childhood in you. That's
coming:
But don't pray for it, my dear.
Oh, Michal that's the reason I so much want you to listen
to me. The inflamed and dark season
And bitterness will come, and then I dread your saying to
yourself: 'Fera she hated life; Fera
Preferred death; Fera was wise.' I wasn't; at least you
mustn't think so. I welched on my fate,
(And failed of course, failure's my root in nature) but I
am ashamed. So you must listen to me, Michal,

My praise of life, by my dead father, by the dying oak.
What I've lived has not been lucky you know,
If I can praise it, who'd not? But how good it is, Michal,
to live! Good for what? Ah, there's the question.
For the pleasure of it? Hardly for that. Take your own
life, mine's marked, mine's worse than usual. Your
mother
Lies yonder; you never knew her, you missed the *pleasure*
of knowing her. You missed the pains too; you might
have hated her.
More likely you'd have loved her deeply; you'd have been
sad then to see her wasting with age and pain,
Those years would come; and you'd have felt the salt
fountains of loneliness
Drain from your eyes when the day came and she died.
There's not a pleasure in the world not paid for,
Michal,
In pain with a penny or two for interest. But youth, they
say, is a shining time, and no doubt for you
The pleasures outsun the pains. Then the hair grays, and
the teeth blacken or drop, and the sky blackens.
You've swollen ankles and shrunk thighs, and horrible
hanging breasts that flap like a hound's ears,
Or death comes first . . . Oh, but I'm wrong, it's life I was
praising! And the pain to the pleasure is sun to candle.
Joy never kills, you know, the most violent joy
Never drove anyone mad. Pain kills, and pain drives mad;
and extreme pain can feed for days
On the stretched flesh; the extremes of pleasure rot in two
minutes.

Oh yes, but, Michal,
Surely life's . . . good? My father—his thoughts were deep,

Patient and wise—believed it was good because it was
growing.
At first it was a morsel of slime on the sea,
It grew to be worms and fishes, lizards and snakes,
You see the progress, then things with hair and hot blood,
It was coming up from the ocean and climbing mountains,
Subduing the earth, molding its bundle of nerves
Into the magnificent mind of man, and passing
Beyond man, to more wonders. That helped my father!
He loved that. You and me of course it can't help,
Because we know nothing goes on forever.
What good is better and better if best draws blank?
Here's the oak was growing upward a hundred years
And now it withers. Sometime the world
Will change, only a little too hot or too cold
Or too dry, and then life will go like the oak.
Then what will all my father's magnificent thoughts,
Michal, and all the dreams of your children be worth?
Well, we must praise life for some other reason.
For surely it's . . . good? We know it must be. Here every
morning
You bring food to this bird to keep it alive:
Because you love it: in its filth, in misery, in prison. What's
wretcheder than a caged eagle? Guess. I'll not tell.
And you'd be bitter cruel to keep it alive: sick-feathered,
abject, broken-armed: only, you know,
Life is so *good*. It's true the creature seems ungrateful:
but I am not grateful either; to Dante
Vitello who pumped the breath into my body."
She stopped and looked at Michal's white face, and said
"You haven't heard from Hood yet? He went so suddenly,
He ought to write you." Michal said "No," and Fera:
"You know nothing about him?" She cried trembling:

"Why do you ask about Hood? Why do you ask about Hood?
Let me alone." "Ah," Fera said, "do you think
That something has happened to him?" "He'll never come back.
It was your fault." "I'm sure he'll never come back,"
She said with a still face. "Now let's go down.
But I can't joke about your eagle, Michal.
The hopeless cage of pain is a lamp
Shining rays that go right through the flesh
And etch the secrets of bone. Mine aches. Oh no, Michal,
I couldn't do it: but George would kill him for you:
Or ask your father: that's better: those are the hands."

Another morning Fera went up
Secretly under the redwoods to the Rock's foot,
Where the great ribbed and battering granite face
Came down and found earth. In spring the cliff-swallows nest
A third of the way up, and a pair of duck-hawks
Two thirds of the way. High in air the gray dome
Seemed swaying from the sweep of the small fibrous clouds.
Fera crept back and forth at the foot with pale
Spying eyes: but this loose earth was only a squirrel's mound,
And that was a gopher's digging: for hours: and she found
Stones had been rolled together, their brown earth-bellies
Turned up to the sky, and the gray lichenous backs
Downward, there was fresh earth below, with grass-blades
Half buried, and ferns trampled. One rain had fallen.
She stood and gazed and said to him there: "Did I not say beforehand

That after we were dead I should have no rest after all but
run moaning
On the gray shore, gnawing for my hunger a wrist of
shadow?" She found a brown scurf on the slope rocks
Above, and thought, "This is the blood that burst from
your mouth when you fell"; caressing with hers the
doubtful
Crust, that was really a brown lichen. "Oh, why would
you not listen to me? You chose to die
Rather than live. Ah, you'd learned wisdom somewhere,
you were too young to be wise, when with one
beautiful
Act of delight, lovely to the giver as the taker, you might
have made
A star for yourself and for me salvation." She rose and
said to the grave: "It was I that killed you. The old man
Who lives in hell for it was only my hands."

XIV

It was true; and it was Cawdor that paid the suffering.
The woman found ease in words and outcry; the man,
The more sensitive by sex and by his nature,
Had forbidden himself action because one act
Was grown his cancer; speech because speech betrays;
Even thought, in one regard, for if Hood's guilt
Were not monstrous the punishment became monstrous,
And if he had been solicited into adultery
His guilt was not monstrous but halved and natural;
There was evidence enough for that, and there
Thought was forbidden. Meanwhile his mind remained
Implacably clear for the rest, cloudless harsh light
On what he had done, memory not dimmed with time

But magnified and more real, not masked with any
Mysticism, that comes most often and stands
Between the criminal and his crime, a redeemer
Shifting the load onto fate; no failure toward unreason
Except the fantasy of his wife's innocence.

His loved canyon was grown hateful and terrible;
He longed to go away, go away, but that
Was cowardice, the set pride and code of his life
Prohibited that; he desired to kill himself,
But that was cowardice; to go and accuse himself,
But that was a kind of cowardice; all the outlets of action
Were locked and locked. But the most present desire,
And the most self-despised, was to ask advice
No matter of whom: of George, of Dante Vitello:
He yearned on them with his eyes: but that was cowardice
And ridiculous too. Day by day the tensions of his mind
Were screwed tighter in silence. He had some strength,
Though not the strength his vanity used to imagine,
And now in the deadlock of his powers endurance
Continued still. He felt the eyes of his house
That used to peer at him from behind now openly
Glitter before his face. He believed they all knew,
Save little Michal, and were kept quiet by fear,
They watched his face for weakness, as the blackbirds
In Carmel Valley watch the green fruit for softness.

After the flood in December the later rains
Fell scant, shrewd north wind heeling listless falls
Blew the hills dry; Cawdor discovered his mind
Building conjectural bridges between the drought
And the curse of his deed; he conquered the sick thought,
Another cowardice.

In March when the cows were calving
Came printed news of foot-and-mouth disease
Among the cattle in the North, it had come in
Through San Francisco from Asia. An infected herd
Had been destroyed. Cawdor read and feared nothing,
His herd in the isolation of the coast canyon
Would be the last. Yet he dreamed in the night
That he was slaughtering his herd. A bench was dug
To stand on, in the steep wall of a gully;
He stood there with the sledge-hammer and Jesus Acanna
All black on a black horse against the twilight
Drove in the cattle. One swing of the hammer for each
On the peak between the horns, but the white-faced heifer
Sidled her head and the blow crushed the horn.
Bawling and slopped with blood down the sleek shoulders,
Plunging among the carcasses . . . The dream returned
Too many times; the plague increasing in the north
He warned his men to guard the pasture and watch
For strays; then the dream ceased; but the hurt heifer
Still troubled his dreams.

His mind had relented toward Fera,
Innocent sufferer and as wretched as himself.
He saw now that both George and Michal hated her.
Her arm had knitted crooked, it pained always
In her pale eyes. He spoke to her kindly; she answered
patiently.
He saw as in a vision that if he should choose
He might go back to his own room from Hood's
This very night, and all be as it was before.
To hell with the glittering eyes, they would keep quiet.
"No," he said and went out of the house. But she

Followed and overtook him under the cypresses
In the evening twilight.

Michal and George were left
In the lamplight in the room, and Michal said
"I want you . . . " she made more words but they were too
mumbled
To understand; she stopped and drew breath and said
Astonishingly aloud, as if she were calling
Across a canyon: "I want you to kill my eagle.
I ought never to have kept it. Nothing but wretchedness.
George, will you kill it quickly and without pain
To-morrow morning?" He stared at her and said
"We've other troubles to think of." "Yes. If you won't
I'll do it myself." "I will. Don't cry, Michal."
She went up-stairs crying.

In the twilight under the trees
Fera touched Cawdor's arm and said timidly: "The best
Would be not to've been born at all; but if we are bound
to live why should we hate each other?"
He turned in surprise, he had forgotten her. "You are not
bound." "By failures of nature. I am like a sick
beast . . .
Like Michal's eagle . . . I can't do for myself. I've tried.
Think of *me* a little. You did the other
No evil but eternal good. Forget him now, and if I can't
end: failure's my peg that I hang on:
Mayn't we go back and live as we were before? You loved
me once, when I was a child and you
Were a man." He stood silent thinking of another matter,
suddenly he barked with laughter and said,

"What am I now?" "A living God: you could answer
prayer if you pleased." "Don't be troubled," he said,
"About God. You talk about God
The day before you go mad." "I can't do that either. Are
you afraid to live," she answered,
"Because they whisper? But they know nothing; they've
not a thread of evidence. I've talked to them all, not one
But I, not one but I could betray you." She peered up at
his face to see what it said in the twilight.
It said nothing; he was thinking of another matter, and
walking the open way from the trees, slowly
Toward the sea's fading light. "Besides, they are all afraid
of you. Oh listen!" she said. "We two alone
Have all the decision. Nobody but I can twitch the reins
in your hands. Look at me." She caught his arm.
"Am I changed?" He looked, and suddenly laughed with
pleasure. "Why . . . like a blown-out candle. Perfectly
changed.
The fragrance all gone, all the wind fallen." He failed to
see the lightning pallor, he was so prisoned
In the surprise of his mind. "No more in my eyes than a
dead stick. No more," he said in astonishment,
"Than Concha Rosas." He spoke with no intention of
cruelty, his mind in the pain of its own bonds
Islanded alone, incapable of feeling another's. She clasped
her throat with her hand and said shuddering:
"For this. No, not another time.
I went on my knees to Hood, I made myself a shameless
beggar, I washed his feet with tears.
That's not done twice. To love me: and he would not
Ah, God how can I make you know it? I duped you too
well. Ah, dupe, Ah, fool," she stammered, "Ah,
murderer.

Machine that one winds up and it goes and does it. I
wound you, I was the one. Now the air's fire
To drink and the days and nights the teeth and throat of
a dog: shall I hide your eyes with my hand always
From what you have done, to let you die in sweet ignorance?"
He said, "Go on. Strain it out, gasping, a heifer
With the first calf." "It's the only child I'll bear you. I
hope you will like the child. You killed the other
Woman's but mine perhaps will spill *you*
From the same rock. For proofs: ask Michal, she heard me
pray to him for love: ask Concha Rosas again,
The fat beast listened and saw, she heard me, she helped
me fool you: ask Jesus Acanna,
Watched me lead Hood from my father's earth to the
laurel to be my lover: *I* led him, *I* called him, *I* flung
Flowers and fire at his feet: he never at mine: and he
refused me, he died for that. Ask your eyes,
Heartless blue stones in their caves, wanted to be blind
and they saw,
They saw me come down in the rain to call him, the rain
steamed where it struck, I was hot, I walked in a
shameless
Burning heat; my father was dying but I ran down.
And again you saw me, Hood was naked in bed at dawn,
you caught me in his room. Had he received me
Gladly or kindly, had he raised his arms to receive me? I
begged and he put me by, I broke in to beg
And he was driving me out when you came. He remembered
his father's honor, he was a fool and faithful,
He's paid for it, he was faithful to you, you paid the
wages. Ah, wait, I've more.
It's precious to me to tell you these things, I've hardly
desired honey-sweet death a longer while."

"You lie too much," he answered, "I asked you before to tell me. Pour it out."
He stood like a gray tree in the twilight, only a surface trembling, the axe was blunted in the bark,
Fera thought; and she said: "I asked him to cut leaves from the laurel to lay in my father's grave,
There are no flowers in this ditch,
And under the laurel I gave him my love. Are you glad that he had my love? That saves you, that lets you live.
The old husband happy in his wife's pleasures.
Under the laurel it was, behind the concealing oaks, under the laurel it was. Before,
I had only cried out and begged with tears, but there I gave him my body, my arms about him, my breasts
Against him: be patient will you, this is not much, this is not the poison: I gave him my flesh to eat,
As Michal takes up meat to the eagle, but he was wilder than the eagle.
He remembered his father's honor, he would not feed. My arms were his cage, I held the meat to his mouth,
He would not feed." Her face distorted itself and seemed to reflect flame, like the white smoke
Of a hidden fire of green wood shining at night, twisting as it rises. Gipsies crouch by the smoke's root
Watching strange flesh simmer in the pot between the forked sticks. When the wind varies their eyes prickle
And the shine of the smoke hides the gray stars. Her face writhed like the shining smoke and she cried and said:
"I wish the little rivers under the laughing kingfishers in every canyon were fire, and the ocean
Fire, and my heart not afraid to go down.

I broke my heart against his mouth like honeycomb, he
would not take me, Oh, the bitter honey, the
black-blooded
Drops from the wax, no wonder he refused me. There was
a lion-skin
I wore to my death, was it you stole it or Concha? He
gave it to me, his one gift, but your house
Is a house of thieves. One boy was honest and so you
killed him. The boy respected his father's possession.
He despised me, he spat me out. Then when I pressed him
hard and set fire to his body: the heart and soul
I never could reach, they were both stones: he took his
hunter's knife in his hand, he made the pain
Of the point in his flesh a servant against me. Into his
thigh he drove it, he laughed and was lame, and
triumphed,
And limped into the darkness of death."

She stood silent, and Cawdor remembered
his son's lameness
Stumbling under the old man's coffin up the steep hill. He
groaned aloud, then Fera's face
Gleaming spotted the darkness before his eyes. "I loved
him," she said. "Love is a trap that takes
The trapper and his game in the same teeth. The first to
die has the luck. They hang bleeding together.
But you were a mere dupe and a common murderer,
Not love but envy, dupe and fool, what will you do?"
He swayed against the dark hill, "You make the lies,"
He said hoarsely, "must I always believe them?
Time. Time. All my damnation draws
From having done in a haste. What do you want?"
"If I were you

And had your strength I'd kill the woman first,
Then cut out the eyes that couldn't tell my innocent
Boy's head from a calf's to butcher,
And smell my way to the Rock and take the jump."
"I asked you," he said, "because a known devil's
Word is a warning." She came and touched him. "The
first's
Easiest," she said, "to kill the woman: the rest
Follows of its own accord." She stroked his face
and said
"It is all easy." He took her throat in his hands,
She did not tremble nor flinch; he tightened his
fingers
Slowly, as if he were dreaming the thing, not doing it,
Then her mouth opened, but the ivory face
Kept its composure still; his fingers closed
A little harder and half checked the hot breath.
Suddenly she clawed at his hands with hers, she cried
"Have pity! I didn't mean it. Oh, Oh, I was lying.
Let me live!" He set her by and ran back to the house,
She heard him sob as he ran.

George was alone
In the lamp-lit room, Cawdor came in and said
"It's nothing," and went up-stairs, his eyes so
sunken
That no gleam showed. He shut himself in the room
He used now, where Hood had slept before. George
followed
Quietly and saw the crack under the door
Silent of light; he listened and heard no sound.
Then he returned down-stairs. Fera had come in;
She made a smile and passed him and went to her place.

XV

In the morning Cawdor failed to come down; Michal
At length knocked at his door. She listened, trembling,
And got no answer. She opened the door. He stood
Against the window and said "Is it you Michal?
I'm not well. Let me alone." She saw that the bed
Had not been slept in; she could not see his face
Against the shining light, but his voice frightened her,
So gentle and forlorn. "Let me bring you some breakfast,
Father?" "No," he said, "no. But there's one thing
You could do for me." "What thing?" "To let me alone.
Nothing else. Nothing else." She saw that his face
Kept turning toward the bed, the eyes and features
Could hardly be seen against the morning light.
She thought he meant to lie down.

When Michal had gone
He locked the door, and leaning to the bed whispered:
"She didn't see you. How astonished she'd have been,
She thinks you're hunting in the north." He smiled fondly
And touched the pillow. "You always had fine hair
But now it has grown longer." A sad perplexity
Wrinkled his face; when he drew back his hand
His eyes were again serene. He went to the window
And stood with his back against the light. "From here
I see you the most clearly. Ah, no, lie quiet.
You've had a fall," he said shaking, "don't speak.
This puts my eyes in heaven." He stood a long while
And his face darkened. "She keeps begging to die.
Plenty of others want that and make less noise.
It was only a sorrowful joke last night,
I'd not have done it. I made her beg off at least.

But when she squealed I hardly could let go,
My fingers cramped like the arms of breeding toads.
I've lived some months in pain."

He listened, and said:
"I know. Thank God. But if you had died, what then?
I had too much foolish pride to throw the game
Because it hurt." He paused and said "I thought
I needed punishment but death's no punishment.
I thought of telling the sheriff": he laughed. "I know him.
And a judge save me? I had to judge myself.
Run to a judge was only running away
From judgment; I thought I'd not do that; shame Michal
And do no good. Running away. I thought the same
Of killing myself. Oh, I've been thinking.
If I'd believed in hellfire I'd have done it
Most nights of the week." He listened, and shook his head.
"No value in needless pain? Oh, yet if I lay
As damned with blood as I believed I was
I'd manage somehow. Tit for tat is good sense.
The debt was to myself as well as to you,
And mostly I've paid my debts. Well, I thank God.
This black's turned gray."

Michal had found her brother
Mending iron at the forge, the little shed
Behind the work-shop; she'd heard the hammer and found
him.
"Have you forgotten your promise?" "Why, no," George
answered,
"I'll do it for you. I thought you'd change your mind."
She was as pale as if a dear friend's death
Were being sealed in the plot. "Then do it quickly.

I think that father," she said, "is going to be sick.
Our lives perhaps will change, I'll not have time
For trapping squirrels to notch the dreary days
Of the cage with pitiful instants of pleasure." He frowned
And struck the iron, the red darkening, with scales
Of black, and white flecks.

While George went to the house
For his revolver, Michal climbed up the hill
Weeping; but when he came with death in his hand
She'd not go away, but watched. At the one shot
The great dark bird leaped at the roof of the cage
In silence and struck the wood; it fell, then suddenly
Looked small and soft, muffled in its folded wings.

The nerves of men after they die dream dimly
And dwindle into their peace; they are not very passionate,
And what they had was mostly spent while they lived.
They are sieves for leaking desire; they have many
pleasures
And conversations; their dreams too are like that.
The unsocial birds are a greater race;
Cold-eyed, and their blood burns. What leaped up to death,
The extension of one storm-dark wing filling its world,
Was more than the soft garment that fell. Something had
flown away. Oh cage-hoarded desire,
Like the blade of a breaking wave reaped by the wind, or
flame rising from fire, or cloud-coiled lightning
Suddenly unfurled in the cave of heaven: I that am
stationed, and cold at heart, incapable of burning,
My blood like standing sea-water lapped in a stone pool,
my desire to the rock, how can I speak of you?
Mine will go down to the deep rock.

This rose,
Possessing the air over its emptied prison,
The eager powers at its shoulders waving shadowless
Unwound the ever-widened spirals of flight
As a star light, it spins the night-stabbing threads
From its own strength and substance: so the aquiline desire
Burned itself into meteor freedom and spired
Higher still, and saw the mountain-dividing
Canyon of its captivity (that was to Cawdor
Almost his world) like an old crack in a wall,
Violet-shadowed and gold-lighted; the little stain
Spilt on the floor of the crack was the strong forest;
The grain of sand was the Rock. A speck, an atomic
Center of power clouded in its own smoke
Ran and cried in the crack; it was Cawdor; the other
Points of humanity had neither weight nor shining
To prick the eyes of even an eagle's passion.

This burned and soared. The shining ocean below lay on
the shore
Like the great shield of the moon come down, rolling
bright rim to rim with the earth. Against it the multiform
And many-canyoned coast-range hills were gathered into
one carven mountain, one modulated
Eagle's cry made stone, stopping the strength of the sea.
The beaked and winged effluence
Felt the air foam under its throat and saw
The mountain sun-cup Tassajara, where fawns
Dance in the steam of the hot fountains at dawn,
Smoothed out, and the high strained ridges beyond
Cachagua,
Where the rivers are born and the last condor is dead,
Flatten, and a hundred miles toward morning the Sierras

Dawn with their peaks of snow, and dwindle and smooth
down
On the globed earth.

It saw from the height and desert space of
unbreathable air
Where meteors make green fire and die, the ocean dropping
westward to the girdle of the pearls of dawn
And the hinder edge of the night sliding toward Asia; it
saw far under eastward the April-delighted
Continent; and time relaxing about it now, abstracted
from being, it saw the eagles destroyed,
Mean generations of gulls and crows taking their world:
turn for turn in the air, as on earth
The white faces drove out the brown. It saw the white
decayed and the brown from Asia returning;
It saw men learn to outfly the hawk's brood and forget it
again; it saw men cover the earth and again
Devour each other and hide in caverns, be scarce as
wolves. It neither wondered nor cared, and it saw
Growth and decay alternate forever, and the tides
returning.

It saw, according to the sight of its kind, the archetype
Body of life a beaked carnivorous desire
Self-upheld on storm-broad wings: but the eyes
Were spouts of blood; the eyes were gashed out; dark blood
Ran from the ruinous eye-pits to the hook of the beak
And rained on the waste spaces of empty heaven.
Yet the great Life continued; yet the great Life
Was beautiful, and she drank her defeat, and devoured
Her famine for food.

There the eagle's phantom perceived
Its prison and its wound were not its peculiar wretchedness,
All that lives was maimed and bleeding, caged or in
blindness,
Lopped at the ends with death and conception, and shrewd
Cautery of pain on the stumps to stifle the blood, but not
Refrains for all that; life was more than its functions
And accidents, more important than its pains and pleasures,
A torch to burn in with pride, a necessary
Ecstasy in the run of the cold substance,
And scape-goat of the greater world. (But as for me,
I have heard the summer dust crying to be born
As much as ever flesh cried to be quiet.)
Pouring itself on fulfilment the eagle's passion
Left life behind and flew at the sun, its father.
The great unreal talons took peace for prey
Exultantly, their death beyond death; stooped upward,
and struck
Peace like a white fawn in a dell of fire.

XVI

Cawdor in the room in the house, his eyes fixed
On the empty bed: "Age tells. I've known the time . . .
But now from having fasted a night of sleep
After some bad ones, my eyes have a dazzle in them
So that I sometimes lose your face, then instantly
The trouble returns. I was cut deep:
But never half my deserving." He heard a listener
Lean at the door and the latch move a little;
His face blanked and was still. After long silence
A gentle tapping, and spoken through the shut door:
"I think you are not well: let me in a moment.

Your voice has been going on and on like fever
And now why has it stopped?" Cawdor stood shaking
Like a gray horse tethered short to the fence,
Unable to rear or step back, a serpent rattling
Its passionate sistrum in the lupin by the hooves.
He extended hands toward the bed, his eyes widened
To hold their vision, but as he feared it vanished,
Then he was not able to restrain his hands
From feeling the length of the bed, patting and stroking
Where there was nothing but the smooth coverlet.
He stood and hardened himself, the knocking renewed.
"I have been deceived. It began in the dark,"
He whispered, "and I've dreamed on after dawn.
Men go crazy this way . . . not I. All's black again,
But the dream was sweet. Black, black, black. Ah,"
He said to the door, "keep still!"

The knocking ceased
And steps retreated. Suddenly his black anguish
Compelled him to kneel by the bed. "What shall I do?
Kill that woman? I've promised not to kill
Fly nor stinking beetle. Nor myself: that
Would be a little too easy, I am a murderer
But not a coward yet. Nothing, is hardest to do.
Oh, God show me a way. Nothing?" The prayer
And the attitude stiffened his nerves with self-contempt.
He ceased and stood up. "Nor this." Himself was
responsible,
Himself must choose, himself must endure. He stood
And looked at the bed, remembering the sweet dream.

More steps came to the door and he drew it open
Before one knocked. Fera said "You are sick,

And I was afraid to come back alone. I brought
Concha Rosas." He looked from one to the other,–
"Both my vomits," he said gently. "I'll never
Send you away. This is something." She whispered to him:
"You are in danger. Everyone here . . . knows.
Ask Concha. If you shut yourself up they'll tell; they've
been asked;
Only the fear of your face stops them.
Jesus Acanna was asked in Monterey
When he drove in the steers." Cawdor said gently:
"Stay here. I'll keep you with me both days and nights
For a live spark between the eye-lid and the eye.
What ails you to bring good news?" "I knew he was going
mad.
Good news? Why, they'll not hang you. I'll be your perfect
Witness to keep you alive. Buried alive
While all the strength you're proud of rots and drops off,
And all the stupid and deceived mind
Tears itself into red strips behind gray
Stones and black iron. Where is it, San Quentin? Oh, kill
yourself Cawdor.
You have no better hope." "I am all you say,
Blind, blind, blind dupe," he answered, "but not a
coward yet." "My God,
Watch the man cling, Concha. Who'd ever think
That *his* was sweet to live? But it's not love of life,
It's terror of death." He was not listening. He looked
With softened anxious eyes at the bed, his lips
Moved, though he did not speak. She, not in mockery:
"What do you see?" "A face that I know perfectly
Was crushed—what day of the month is it?—three months
And certain days ago, to a red lump
Of sudden destruction: but can you see?—he smiles at me.

I know there is nothing there." Fera laughed, "Concha
Has scuttled away. *I* see his angry eyes
And tumbled light brown hair and bare strong
shoulders . . ."
"Yes: his hair." " . . . when I ran in here at dawn,
He lifted himself in the bed like a white sea-lion
Out of the running wave. His breast was bare.
And it was smooth, it was like smooth grooved stone.
You caught me here in the room." Cawdor looked down
And smiled and trembled. "Perhaps if I hadn't come.
Perhaps if I hadn't come." "You were pitiful enough,"
She said, "before. We'd both like to think that.
No, he was straight and true and faithful as light.
Hard as crystal, there was not a spot to hold by.
We two are damned." She watched him shaking
And thought that now he would make some end; but he
Looked downward sideways and said "It has faded now.
You needn't wait, I'll never again do anything
Until I have thought and thought. I'll find a way."
He said in the door, "I thought the woman was with you."
"Concha? She scuttled: I told you." "No, you said
nothing."

She followed. When they were on the stair they heard
George's revolver-shot that killed the eagle,
And the quick echo. Cawdor stopped on the stair
And looked at Fera's face. "Why did you turn
So strangely," she said, "what do you see? I fear
You have waited too long already and now your mind
Is helpless among many voices and ghosts.
Kill yourself, Cawdor, and be safe from that,
For soon it will be too late." He said drearily,
"Since you fooled me my ears and eyes have the trick.

But," with a burrowing motion of the head forward,
"I'm not deceived. Not deceived. . . . Who has Hood's
rifle?"
"Ah," she answered, "old fox, that hole won't hide you.
He fired because you were coming at him to kill him:
Your guilt's no less." "I lost it," he said, "in the night in
the oaks.
I've often looked there, he loved it." They went out-doors
Under the twisted cypress trees and Cawdor said,
"What were you saying? He fired in the air, not at me.
If you were full of eyes you'd find no fault in him."
Fera laughed out, and pointing at the oak on the hill:
"Hurrah, she's done it. That was the shot. Oh, well done
Michal.
See if I always fail. The bird shut in a box
Was eating bitter meat for years and now it is blessed.
I've been begging her
To make it blessed. Its arm was like mine." "Killed it?
I'm sorry," he said, "for Michal." Suddenly he ran
To the dim path and climbed. He shouted "George,
George"; his heavy voice and the echo of his voice
battered
Upward between the walls of the canyon.

He came to the shelf of earth, and hoarse
with breathlessness: "More killing?
You dog, have you got Hood's gun?" Michal looked at his
face with startled wet eyes, George did not speak
But held out the revolver in the flat of his hand. "I
forgot that," Cawdor said. "Oh Michal, you loved
This brave-eyed thing. You fed it for years." "It was
unhappy, father." "By God, if you go killing

Unhappiness who'll be left in the houses? Forgive me," he said humbly, "I've much to bear." She, trembling:
"Why . . . " she wetted her lips with her tongue . . . "why did you ask about Hood's rifle, he wouldn't leave it?"
George, hastily: "His mind's on another matter. You told me to fix the branding-iron shafts . . . " Fera had come
Behind Cawdor, and driving her face like an axe between them: "Let him confess. He came to confess.
Listen to him for that will deliver his mind, thence he may win
Your eagle's quietness: we used to feel this cage like a black sun shining darkness on the canyon.
Now you've put out the sun, you've cured the sky with a gun-shot, nothing but a draggled feather-duster
Left in the cage. Let him confess." Cawdor said hoarsely: "I have learned that Hood was innocent. This woman
So angered me that I threatened his life in the night. I am dull and easy to lie to. Hood went away
Rather than quarrel with the fool his father; he left his rifle under my feet by the fire; I lost it;
If I could find it I'd keep it for him." "Ai," Fera cried sharply, "this is no good. Wait, that gray face
Will ripen by summer: you can't bear it forever. What did he use, his revolver? Even so little
A creature as that is a key to peace." Cawdor said, "Let me see it again." George clicked the cylinder
Out of the frame before he handed it to him. Cawdor took and returned it. "If I were weak enough
I could find ways, though I am not wise." He saw a knife-edged flake of chipped flint or chalcedony
On the earth at his feet; they stood by Fera's father's grave, and the spring rains had failed and not grassed it.

Cawdor picked up the Indian-wrought stone. "There
were people here before us," he said, "and others
will come
After our time. These poor flints were their knives, wher-
ever you dig you find them, and now I forget
What we came up for. Why do you fix your eyes on me?
For I can neither imagine what I must do
Nor what I should say. You are like shadows." George
said "Father:
Send this woman away. This is the bitter fountain, this is
your sickness." "For the rifle," she answered,
"Acanna has it. Send me away: do: I've a pretty story for
strangers, I'll bring back eyes
And dig for the old dog's hoard of bones." She said to
Cawdor: "Now you've grown gentle, you can't eat
meat,
But the others know we'd venison Thursday, Jesus
Acanna killed it. He says that he got his rifle
In Monterey, have you seen the rifle, Michal? You country
people have quick minds." "Oh, this is nothing,"
Cawdor groaned, "What does Hood want with a gun ? He
hunts no more.
However . . . do you see the sun?" George took his arm:
"Come, let's go down." "Now it's due south," he
answered,
"And men come home from the starved fields for food.
We'll go and ask him." George made a sign to Michal
So that she stayed behind when the others went down.
And Cawdor, seeing it: "That was well done. I see you now.
A moment ago you were like shadows of moths
When lamplight falls on the earth outside the window.
If I could have caught you I couldn't have held you. Send
away sweet Fera?

What should we do without her?" She said: "That flint
Came from an old man's grave you used to despise
For his great weakness; he was the only mind in this ditch;
But now you don't. What's it for, to nick an artery?"
"It is hard," he answered, "and pleasant in the hand.
Last night I threw my knife out of the window
For fear it might use itself of its own accord.
I'd a good dream."

He saw Acanna among the cypresses
And called him with the old strength of his voice. "I hear
that you've got Hood's rifle, you found it in the little
oaks
Near by the Rock. Oh, keep it," he said, "keep it. That's
nothing. Kill all the deer for Hood has quit hunting,
Buck, fawn and doe. They say they have foot-and-mouth
disease
And carry it over the mountain. But if you see a white doe,
That's the worst kind. Cut out her tongue when she drops,
It's poison. . . . You know that I killed him.
You all know it. George knows it. You've been whispering
for long,
Watching my face. You've been staunch and not told
For askings: but that was wrong, it makes you accessory.
Now you must ride and tell, don't stay for dinner.
Get meat in the house and eat on the road, for now
I've confessed: if you don't tell you'll be in the same
Sickness with Cawdor. Go. Go." He pushed by him,
And Acanna stood all twisted, as Cawdor's hands
Had left him, unable to move, looking for guidance. At
length
George twitched his dead-white face and answered:
"Go on.

Do what he says. He has chosen." While they stood,
Cawdor
Faced the hill so that his back was toward them and drove
The point of the flint through fold and flesh of each eye,
Drawing sidewise on the stroke, so that his sight
Was burst, and blood and water ran down to his feet.
He did not groan, but Fera saw the red stream
Fall by some yellow flowers. She cried "Have you done
Wisely at last? Not with that chip?" He groaned then,
But answered nothing. Then George ran to him and saw
The bitter thing he had done, and moved with sudden
Ungovernable pity thrust the revolver
Into his hand. Cawdor said: "What's this? Oh,
This thing. Keep it for cage-birds.
We have other plans. The decent girl my pleasant companion
Has promised to lead me by the hand up to the Rock
And prove our wings." But Fera staggered and said,
Her arms hanging straight down, head drooped, and knees
Bent like weak age: "I am broken. It is finished."
She covered her eyes against him. "My courage is past.
I have always failed." He said, "I'd not have flown down.
I meant to sit up there and think my old thoughts
Until they come to-morrow and take me. It was mere indulgence.
These punishments are a pitiful self-indulgence.
I'd not the strength to do nothing.

Be kind to Michal:
But spring's weeping-time. Oh, George it was her face
I fell into this darkness to hide myself from.
But when I am taken from the sight of my mountain
It is better to have no eyes. Has Acanna gone?

Your droughty hay-harvest will be a thin sight."
He extended his hands. "Lead me, whoever is here,
Into the house. My head is full of sharp lightnings
And the ground streams and falls under my feet."

The Dead Men's Child

The track across the desert runs vague toward the north
star and then more firmly
Along the clipped butt of the mountain; it curves into a
bay of the cliff, where natural cisterns
Keep water in the streaked rock; the people call them *las
tinajas altas*—the high water-jars—
Which every second or third summer a thunderstorm
Fills with clear life; if the lowest is empty one must climb
to the next. There is a worked-out silver-mine
Gouged in the cliff beyond them; a single ironwood tree
lives on the leakage below them, and here
Men used to camp, coming up from Mexico.

A train of smugglers was lost here long ago.
It is said
The tanks were dry then except the highest, and men who
wanted the smugglers' goods bailed that one empty,
And ambushed up the mountain, defended it with their
rifles. For half the furnace morning the thirsty
Fought up to reach it; when they won it at length it was
found dry. The horses could not go on,
They died, and the men died, of thirst and their wounds.

Across the trail, opposite the ironwood tree,
Stands a low mound of rock and sand, where later travellers

Deposited the parched and mummied companions and
spread them over with a sheet of sand; there had been
already
Two or three graves dug in that barrow. The desert wind
respected none of these burials, the sun
And wind played with the bones and flesh until they were
dust of the barrow.

A good while later, men found
A vein of silver in the cliff and opened the mine. A little
encampment grew up, Mexican laborers
Came with their wives and black-eyed children. One
saint's day evening some of the younger people of the
camp
Made fire on the mound of half forgotten dead men,
opposite the ironwood tree. They ate and drank there
In a circle about the flame, under the desert stars. Rosaria
Rivas was one of the girls
In that company; after some months she was found preg-
nant. She told her parents that when the fire
Died down and the others departed she had remained on
the place. In the night chill she had drawn her skirt
(Being all alone) above her knees to warm them at the
red embers, then suddenly a swirl of wind
From the east blew dust and ashes into her unsheltered
body. So by mere ignorant accident Rosaria
Conceived a child, neither for pleasure nor kindness, only
by the innocent malice of the dark wind
Driving the dust of the dead. Her story was easily
Believed; the more because she had little reason for lying.
Morality was not so enviously strict
Among them that love had to go masked. Her child was
born the due tenth moon after that saint's day,

And she was much pitied, having the pain without the
pleasure. But people soon perceived that her son
Was only a little different from other children; they all are
mongrels between the present and the past,
Their natures drawing as much from men and beasts long
dead as from either parent. Yet in time this child
Of the dust of dead men proved his quality. He throve in
fortune; he was never duped nor reckless; his life
Ran smooth because he had nothing *future* about him.
Men do not stumble on bones mostly but on seeds,
And this young man was not of the sad race of Prometheus,
to waste himself in favor of the future.

Fawn's Foster-Mother

The old woman sits on a bench before the door and quarrels
With her meager pale demoralized daughter.
Once when I passed I found her alone, laughing in the sun
And saying that when she was first married
She lived in the old farmhouse up Garapatas Canyon.
(It is empty now, the roof has fallen
But the log walls hang on the stone foundation; the
redwoods
Have all been cut down, the oaks are standing;
The place is now more solitary than ever before.)
"When I was nursing my second baby
My husband found a day-old fawn hid in a fern-brake
And brought it; I put its mouth to the breast
Rather than let it starve, I had milk enough for three
babies.
Hey, how it sucked, the little nuzzler,
Digging its little hoofs like quills into my stomach.
I had more joy from that than from the others."
Her face is deformed with age, furrowed like a bad road
With market-wagons, mean cares and decay.
She is thrown up to the surface of things, a cell of dry skin
Soon to be shed from the earth's old eye-brows,
I see that once in her spring she lived in the streaming
arteries,
The stir of the world, the music of the mountain.

A Redeemer

The road had steepened and the sun sharpened on the high
ridges; the stream probably was dry,
Certainly not to be come to down the pit of the canyon.
We stopped for water at the one farm
In all that mountain. The trough was cracked with
drought, the moss on the boards dead, but an old dog
Rose like a wooden toy at the house-door silently. I said
"There will be water somewhere about,"
And when I knocked a man showed us a spring of water.
Though his hair was nearly white I judged him
Forty years old at most. His eyes and voice were muted.
It is likely he kept his hands hidden,
I failed to see them until we had dipped the spring. He
stood then on the lip of the great slope
And looked westward over an incredible country to the
far hills that dammed the sea-fog: it billowed
Above them, cascaded over them, it never crossed them,
gray standing flood. He stood gazing, his hands
Were clasped behind him; I caught a glimpse of serous red
under the fingers, and looking sharply
When they drew apart saw that both hands were wounded.
I said "Your hands are hurt." He twitched them
from sight,
But after a moment having earnestly eyed me displayed
them. The wounds were in the hearts of the palms,

Pierced to the backs like stigmata of crucifixion. The horrible raw flesh protruded, glistening
And granular, not scabbed, nor a sign of infection. "These are old wounds." He answered, "Yes. They don't heal." He stood
Moving his lips in silence, his back against that fabulous basin of mountains, fold beyond fold,
Patches of forest and scarps of rock, high domes of dead gray pasture and gray beds of dry rivers,
Clear and particular in the burning air, too bright to appear real, to the last range
The fog from the ocean like a stretched compacted thunderstorm overhung; and he said gravely:
"I pick them open. I made them long ago with a clean steel. It is only a little to pay—"
He stretched and flexed the fingers, I saw his sunburnt lips whiten in a line, compressed together,
"If only it proves enough for a time—to save so many." I searched his face for madness but that
Is often invisible, a subtle spirit. "There never," he said, "was any people earned so much ruin.
I love them, I am trying to suffer for them. It would be bad if I should die, I am careful
Against excess." "You think of the wounds," I said, "of Jesus?" He laughed angrily and frowned, stroking
The fingers of one hand with the other. "Religion is the people's opium. Your little Jew-God?
My pain," he said with pride, "is voluntary.
They have done what never was done before. Not as a people takes a land to love it and be fed,
A little, according to need and love, and again a little; sparing the country tribes, mixing

Their blood with theirs, their minds with all the rocks and rivers, their flesh with the soil: no, without hunger
Wasting the world and your own labor, without love possessing, not even your hands to the dirt but plows
Like blades of knives; heartless machines; houses of steel: using and despising the patient earth . . .
Oh, as a rich man eats a forest for profit and a field for vanity, so you came west and raped
The continent and brushed its people to death. Without need, the weak skirmishing hunters, and without mercy.
Well, God's a scare-crow; no vengeance out of old rags. But there are acts breeding their own reversals
In their own bellies from the first day. "I am here" he said—and broke off suddenly and said "They take horses
And give them sicknesses through hollow needles, their blood saves babies: I am here on the mountain making
Antitoxin for all the happy towns and farms, the lovely blameless children, the terrible
Arrogant cities. I used to think them terrible: their gray prosperity, their pride: from up here
Specks of mildew.

But when I am dead and all you with whole hands think of nothing but happiness,
Will you go mad and kill each other? Or horror come over the ocean on wings and cover your sun?
I wish," he said trembling, "I had never been born."

His wife came from the door while he was talking. Mine asked her quietly, "Do you live all alone here,

Are you not afraid?" "Certainly not," she answered, "he
is always gentle and loving. I have no complaint
Except his groans in the night keep me awake often. But
when I think of other women's
Troubles: my own daughter's: I'm older than my husband,
I have been married before: deep is my peace."

An Artist

That sculptor we knew, the passionate-eyed son of a
quarryman,
Who astonished Rome and Paris in his meteor youth, and
then was gone, at his high tide of triumphs,
Without reason or good-bye; I have seen him again lately,
after twenty years, but not in Europe.

In desert hills I rode a horse slack-kneed with thirst.
Down a steep slope a dancing swarm
Of yellow butterflies over a shining rock made me hope
water. We slid down to the place,
The spring was bitter but the horse drank. I imagined
wearings of an old path from that wet rock
Ran down the canyon; I followed, soon they were lost, I
came to a stone valley in which it seemed
No man nor his mount had ever ventured, you wondered
whether even a vulture'd ever spread sail there.
There were stones of strange form under a cleft in the far
hill; I tethered the horse to a rock
And scrambled over. A heap like a stone torrent, a
moraine,
But monstrously formed limbs of broken carving appeared
in the rock-fall, enormous breasts, defaced heads
Of giants, the eyes calm through the brute veils of fracture.
It was natural then to climb higher and go in

Up the cleft gate. The canyon was a sheer-walled crack
winding at the entrance, but around its bend
The walls grew dreadful with stone giants, presences
growing out of the rigid precipice, that strove
In dream between stone and life, intense to cast their
chaos . . . or to enter and return . . . stone-fleshed,
nerve-stretched
Great bodies ever more beautiful and more heavy with
pain, they seemed leading to some unbearable
Consummation of the ecstasy . . . but there, troll among
Titans, the bearded master of the place accosted me
In a cold anger, a mallet in his hand, filthy and ragged.
There was no kindness in that man's mind,
But after he had driven me down to the entrance he spoke
a little.

The merciless sun had found the slot now
To hide in, and lit for the wick of that stone lamp-bowl a
sky almost, I thought, abominably beautiful;
While our lost artist we used to admire: for now I knew
him: spoke of his passion.

He said, "Marble?
White marble is fit to model a snow-mountain: let man be
modest. Nor bronze: I am bound to have my tool
In my material, no irrelevances. I found this pit of dark-
gray freestone, fine-grained, and tough enough
To make sketches that under any weathering will last
my lifetime. . . .

The town is eight miles off, I can fetch food and no one
follows me home. I have water and a cave

Here; and no possible lack of material. I need, therefore,
nothing. As to companions, I make them.
And models? They are seldom wanted; I know a Basque
shepherd I sometimes use; and a woman of the town.
What more? Sympathy? Praise? I have never desired them
and also I have never deserved them. I will not show
you
More than the spalls you saw by accident.

What I see is the enormous beauty of
things, but what I attempt
Is nothing to that. I am helpless toward that.
It is only to form in stone the mold of some ideal
humanity that might be worthy to *be*
Under that lightning. Animalcules that God (if he were
given to laughter) might omit to laugh at.

Those children of my hands are tortured, because they
feel," he said, "the storm of the outer magnificence.
They are giants in agony. They have seen from my eyes
The man-destroying beauty of the dawns over their notch
yonder, and all the obliterating stars.
But in their eyes they have peace. I have lived a little and
I think
Peace marrying pain alone can breed that excellence in
the luckless race, might make it decent
To exist at all on the star-lit stone breast.

I hope," he said, "that when I grow old and
the chisel drops,
I may crawl out on a ledge of the rock and die like a wolf."

These fragments are all I can remember,

These in the flare of the desert evening. Having been
driven so brutally forth I never returned;
Yet I respect him enough to keep his name and the place
secret. I hope that some other traveller
May stumble on that ravine of Titans after their maker
has died. While he lives, let him alone.

The Summit Redwood

Only stand high a long enough time your lightning will
come: that is what blunts the peaks of redwoods:
But this old tower of life on the hilltop has taken it more
than twice a century, this knows in every
Cell the salty and the burning taste, the shudder and the
voice

The fire from heaven; it has felt the earth's
too
Roaring up hill in autumn, thorned oak-leaves tossing
their bright ruin to the bitter laurel-leaves, and all
Its under-forest has died and died, and lives to be burnt;
the redwood has lived. Though the fire entered,
It cored the trunk while the sapwood increased. The trunk
is a tower, the bole of the trunk is a black cavern,
The mast of the trunk with its green boughs the mountain
stars are strained through
Is like the helmet-spike on the highest head of an army;
black on lit blue or hidden in cloud
It is like the hill's finger in heaven. And when the cloud
hides it, though in barren summer, the boughs
Make their own rain.

Old Escobar had a cunning trick when he
stole beef. He and his grandsons

Would drive the cow up here to a starlight death and hoist
the carcass into the tree's hollow,
Then let them search his cabin, he could smile for pleasure,
to think of his meat hanging secure
Exalted over the earth and the ocean, a theft like a star,
secret against the supreme sky.

Ascent to the Sierras

Beyond the great valley an odd instinctive rising
Begins to possess the ground, the flatness gathers to little
humps and barrows, low aimless ridges,
A sudden violence of rock crowns them. The crowded
orchards end, they have come to a stone knife;
The farms are finished; the sudden foot of the sierra. Hill
over hill, snow-ridge beyond mountain gather
The blue air of their height about them.

Here at the foot of the pass
The fierce clans of the mountain you'd think for thousands
of years,
Men with harsh mouths and eyes like the eagles' hunger,
Have gathered among these rocks at the dead hour
Of the morning star and the stars waning
To raid the plain and at moonrise returning driven
Their scared booty to the highlands, the tossing horns
And glazed eyes in the light of torches. The men have
looked back
Standing above these rock-heads to bark laughter
At the burning granaries and the farms and the town
That sow the dark flat land with terrible rubies . . .
lighting the dead . . .
It is not true: from this land

The curse was lifted; the highlands have kept peace with
the valleys; no blood in the sod; there is no old sword
Keeping grim rust, no primal sorrow. The people are all
one people, their homes never knew harrying;
The tribes before them were acorn-eaters, harmless as
deer. Oh, fortunate earth; you must find someone
To make you bitter music; how else will you take bonds
of the future, against the wolf in men's hearts?

Contrast

The world has many seas, Mediterranean, Atlantic, but
here is the shore of the one ocean.
And here the heavy future hangs like a cloud; the
enormous scene; the enormous games preparing
Weigh on the water and strain the rock; the stage is here,
the play is conceived; the players are not found.

I saw on the Sierras, up the Kaweah valley above the
Moro rock, the mountain redwoods
Like red towers on the slopes of snow; about their bases
grew a bushery of Christmas green,
Firs and pines to be monuments for pilgrimage
In Europe; I remembered the Swiss forests, the dark robes
of Pilatus, no trunk like these there;
But these are underwood; they are only a shrubbery
about the boles of the trees.

Our people are clever and masterful;
They have powers in the mass, they accomplish marvels.
It is possible Time will make them before it annuls
them, but at present
There is not one memorable person, there is not one mind
to stand with the trees, one life with the mountains.

Bixby's Landing

They burned lime on the hill and dropped it down here in
an iron car
On a long cable; here the ships warped in
And took their loads from the engine, the water is deep to
the cliff. The car
Hangs half way over in the gape of the gorge,
Stationed like a north star above the peaks of the
redwoods, iron perch
For the little red hawks when they cease from hovering
When they've struck prey; the spider's fling of a cable
rust-glued to the pulleys.
The laborers are gone, but what a good multitude
Is here in return: the rich-lichened rock, the rose-tipped
stonecrop, the constant
Ocean's voices, the cloud-lighted space.
The kilns are cold on the hill but here in the rust of the
broken boiler
Quick lizards lighten, and a rattlesnake flows
Down the cracked masonry, over the crumbled fire-brick.
In the rotting timbers
And roofless platforms all the free companies
Of windy grasses have root and make seed; wild buck-
wheat blooms in the fat
Weather-slacked lime from the bursted barrels.

Two duckhawks darting in the sky of their cliff-hung nest
    are the voice of the headland.
Wine-hearted solitude, our mother the wilderness,
Men's failures are often as beautiful as men's triumphs,
    but your returnings
Are even more precious than your first presence.

Ocean

It dreams in the deepest sleep, it remembers the storm
last month or it feels the far storm
Off Unalaska and the lash of the sea-rain.
It is never mournful but wise, and takes the magical
misrule of the steep world
With strong tolerance, its depth is not moved
From where the green sun fails to where the thin red clay
lies on the basalt
And there has never been light nor life.
The black crystal, the untroubled fountain, the roots of
endurance.

Therefore I belted
The house and the tower and courtyard with stone,
And have planted the naked foreland with future forest
toward noon and morning: for it told me,
The time I was gazing in the black crystal,
To be faithful in storm, patient of fools, tolerant of
memories and the muttering prophets,
It is needful to have night in one's body.

Soliloquy

August and laurelled have been content to speak for an
age, and the ages that follow
Respect them for that pious fidelity;
But you have disfeatured time for timelessness.
They had heroes for companions, beautiful youths to
dream of, rose-marble-fingered
Women shed light down the great lines;
But you have invoked the slime in the skull,
The lymph in the vessels. They have shown men Gods like
racial dreams, the woman's desire,
The man's fear, the hawk-faced prophet's; but nothing
Human seems happy at the feet of yours.
Therefore though not forgotten, not loved, in gray old
years in the evening leaning
Over the gray stones of the tower-top,
You shall be called heartless and blind;
And watch new time answer old thought, not a face
strange nor a pain astonishing;
But you living be laired in the rock
That sheds pleasure and pain like hail-stones.

The Bird with the Dark Plumes

The bird with the dark plumes in my blood,
That never for one moment, however I patched my truces,
Consented to make peace with the people,
It is pitiful now to watch her pleasure in a breath of tempest
Breaking the sad promise of spring.
Are these that morose hawk's wings, vaulting, a mere
mad swallow's,
The snow-shed peak, the violent precipice?
Poor outlaw that would not value their praise do you
prize their blame?
"Their liking," she said, "was a long creance,
But let them be kind enough to hate me, that opens the
sky."
It is almost as foolish my poor falcon
To want hatred as to want love; and harder to win.

To a Young Artist

It is good for strength not to be merciful
To its own weakness, good for the deep urn to run over,
good to explore
The peaks and the deeps, who can endure it,
Good to be hurt, who can be healed afterward: but you
that have whetted consciousness
Too bitter an edge, too keenly daring,
So that the color of a leaf can make you tremble, and your
own thoughts like harriers
Tear the live mind: were your bones mountains,
Your blood rivers to endure it? and all that labor of
discipline labors to death.
Delight is exquisite, pain is more present;
You have sold the armor, you have bought shining with
burning, one should be stronger than strength
To fight baresark in the stabbing field
In the rage of the stars: I tell you unconsciousness is the
treasure, the tower, the fortress;
Referred to that one may live anything;
The temple and the tower: poor dancer on the flints and
shards in the temple porches, turn home.

Tor House

If you should look for this place after a handful of
lifetimes:
Perhaps of my planted forest a few
May stand yet, dark-leaved Australians or the coast
cypress, haggard
With storm-drift; but fire and the axe are devils.
Look for foundations of sea-worn granite, my fingers had
the art
To make stone love stone, you will find some remnant.
But if you should look in your idleness after ten
thousand years:
It is the granite knoll on the granite
And lava tongue in the midst of the bay, by the mouth of
the Carmel
River-valley, these four will remain
In the change of names. You will know it by the wild sea-
fragrance of wind
Though the ocean may have climbed or retired a little;
You will know it by the valley inland that our sun and
our moon were born from
Before the poles changed; and Orion in December
Evenings was strung in the throat of the valley like a
lamp-lighted bridge.
Come in the morning you will see white gulls
Weaving a dance over blue water, the wane of the moon

Their dance-companion, a ghost walking
By daylight, but wider and whiter than any bird in the
world.
My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably
Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on
wind
With the mad wings and the day moon.

George Sterling's Death

Sorrows have come before and have stood mute
With blind implacable masks; when the eyes have
endured them
They draw sidelong and stand
At the shoulder; they never depart.

The sweetest voice has desired silence, the eyes
Have desired darkness, the passion has desired peace.
He that gave, and not asked
But for a friend's sake, has taken

One gift for himself: he gives a greater, he goes
Remembered utterly generous, constraining sorrow
Like winter sundown, splendid
Memory to ennoble our nights.

The gray mothers of rain sail and glide over,
The rain has fallen, the deep-wombed earth is renewed;
Under the greening of the hills
Gulls flock in the black furrows.

And now it is hard to believe he will not return
To be our guest in the house, nor walk beside me
Again by the Carmel river
Or on the Sovranes reef.

Hurt Hawks

I

The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,
The wing trails like a banner in defeat,
No more to use the sky forever but live with famine
And pain a few days: cat nor coyote
Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game without talons.
He stands under the oak-bush and waits
The lame feet of salvation; at night he remembers freedom
And flies in a dream, the dawns ruin it.
He is strong and pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is worse.
The curs of the day come and torment him
At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble that head,
The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.
The wild God of the world is sometimes merciful to those
That ask mercy, not often to the arrogant.
You do not know him, you communal people, or you have forgotten him;
Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him;
Beautiful and wild, the hawks, and men that are dying, remember him.

II

I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk;
but the great redtail
Had nothing left but unable misery
From the bone too shattered for mending, the wing that
trailed under his talons when he moved.
We had fed him six weeks, I gave him freedom,
He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the
evening, asking for death,
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
Implacable arrogance. I gave him the lead gift in the
twilight. What fell was relaxed,
Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded
river cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.

Meditation on Saviors

I

When I considered it too closely, when I wore it like an
element and smelt it like water,
Life is become less lovely, the net nearer than the skin, a
little troublesome, a little terrible.

I pledged myself awhile ago not to seek refuge, neither in
death nor in a walled garden,
In lies nor gated loyalties, nor in the gates of contempt,
that easily lock the world out of doors.

Here on the rock it is great and beautiful, here on the
foam-wet granite sea-fang it is easy to praise
Life and water and the shining stones: but whose cattle
are the herds of the people that one should love them?

If they were yours, then you might take a cattle-breeder's
delight in the herds of the future. Not yours.
Where the power ends let love, before it sours to jealousy.
Leave the joys of government to Caesar.

Who is born when the world wanes, when the brave soul
of the world falls on decay in the flesh increasing
Comes one with a great level mind, sufficient vision,
sufficient blindness, and clemency for love.

This is the breath of rottenness I smelt; from the world
waiting, stalled between storms, decaying a little,
Bitterly afraid to be hurt, but knowing it cannot draw the
savior Caesar but out of the blood-bath.

The apes of Christ lift up their hands to praise love: but
wisdom without love is the present savior,
Power without hatred, mind like a many-bladed machine
subduing the world with deep indifference.

The apes of Christ itch for a sickness they have never
known; words and the little envies will hardly
Measure against that blinding fire behind the tragic eyes
they have never dared to confront.

II

Point Lobos lies over the hollowed water like a humped
whale swimming to shoal; Point Lobos
Was wounded with that fire; the hills at Point Sur
endured it; the palace at Thebes; the hill Calvary.

Out of incestuous love power and then ruin. A man forcing
the imaginations of men,
Possessing with love and power the people: a man defiling
his own household with impious desire.

King Oedipus reeling blinded from the palace doorway,
red tears pouring from the torn pits
Under the forehead; and the young Jew writhing on the
domed hill in the earthquake, against the eclipse

Frightfully uplifted for having turned inward to love the
people:—that root was so sweet Oh, dreadful
agonist?—
I saw the same pierced feet, that walked in the same crime
to its expiation; I heard the same cry.

A bad mountain to build your world on. Am I another
keeper of the people, that on my own shore,
On the gray rock, by the grooved mass of the ocean, the
sicknesses I left behind me concern me?

Here where the surf has come incredible ways out of the
splendid west, over the deeps
Light nor life sounds forever; here where enormous
sundowns flower and burn through color to quietness;

Then the ecstasy of the stars is present? As for the people,
I have found my rock, let them find theirs.
Let them lie down at Caesar's feet and be saved; and he in
his time reap their daggers of gratitude.

III

Yet I am the one made pledges against the refuge con-
tempt, that easily locks the world out of doors.
This people as much as the sea-granite is part of the God
from whom I desire not to be fugitive.

I see them: they are always crying. The shored Pacific
makes perpetual music, and the stone mountains
Their music of silence, the stars blow long pipings of
light: the people are always crying in their hearts.

One need not pity; certainly one must not love. But who
has seen peace, if he should tell them where peace
Lives in the world . . . they would be powerless to
understand; and he is not willing to be reinvolved.

IV

How should one caught in the stone of his own person
dare tell the people anything but relative to that?
But if a man could hold in his mind all the conditions at
once, of man and woman, of civilized

And barbarous, of sick and well, of happy and under
torture, of living and dead, of human and not
Human, and dimly all the human future:—what should per-
suade him to speak? And what could his words change?

The mountain ahead of the world is not forming but fixed.
But the man's words would be fixed also,
Part of that mountain, under equal compulsion; under the
same present compulsion in the iron consistency.

And nobody sees good or evil but out of a brain a
hundred centuries quieted, some desert
Prophet's, a man humped like a camel, gone mad between
the mud-walled village and the mountain sepulchres.

V

Broad wagons before sunrise bring food into the city
from the open farms, and the people are fed.
They import and they consume reality. Before sunrise a
hawk in the desert made them their thoughts.

VI

Here is an anxious people, rank with suppressed blood-
thirstiness. Among the mild and unwarlike
Gautama needed but live greatly and be heard, Confucius
needed but live greatly and be heard·

This people has not outgrown blood-sacrifice, one must
writhe on the high cross to catch at their memories;
The price is known. I have quieted love; for love of the
people I would not do it. For power I would do it.

—But that stands against reason: what is power to a dead
man, dead under torture?—What is power to a man
Living, after the flesh is content? Reason is never a root,
neither of act nor desire.

For power living I would never do it; they are not delight-
ful to touch, one wants to be separate. For power
After the nerves are put away underground, to lighten the
abstract unborn children toward peace . . .

A man might have paid anguish indeed. Except he had
found the standing sea-rock that even this last
Temptation breaks on; quieter than death but lovelier;
peace that quiets the desire even of praising it.

VII

Yet look: are they not pitiable? No: if they lived forever
they would be pitiable:
But a huge gift reserved quite overwhelms them at the
end; they are able then to be still and not cry.

And having touched a little of the beauty and seen a little
of the beauty of things, magically grow
Across the funeral fire or the hidden stench of burial
themselves into the beauty they admired,

Themselves into the God, themselves into the sacred
steep unconsciousness they used to mimic
Asleep between lamp's death and dawn, while the last
drunkard stumbled homeward down the dark street.

They are not to be pitied but very fortunate; they need no
savior, salvation comes and takes them by force,
It gathers them into the great kingdoms of dust and
stone, the blown storms, the stream's-end ocean.

With this advantage over their granite grave-marks, of
having realized the petulant human consciousness
Before, and then the greatness, the peace: drunk from
both pitchers: these to be pitied? These not fortunate?

But while he lives let each man make his health in his
mind, to love the coast opposite humanity
And so be freed of love, laying it like bread on the waters;
it is worst turned inward, it is best shot farthest.

Love, the mad wine of good and evil, the saint's and
murderer's, the mote in the eye that makes its object
Shine the sun black; the trap in which it is better to catch
the inhuman God than the hunter's own image.